

Issue 1, Summer 2015

# MECHANICAL MUSIC WORLD



An Aubert snuffbox  
See article inside

An Association of Musical Box Collectors Publication

From the Editors' Desk

It gives us, as Editors, enormous pleasure to be a part of this exciting new Association. The envisioned wider scope encompasses musical boxes of all shapes and sizes, whether containing tuned teeth, pipes, strings or anything else inside them. Our collection of Fisher Price musical toys from the 1970s as well as Christmas novelties and giant fairground organs all have their place under the umbrella.

There are many very knowledgeable people among our members and between them a huge fund of information is available. To mis-quote a well-known phrase, 'If you have questions, prepare to ask them now!'

It is editorial policy to encourage input from you, the members. It is, after all, your magazine. Please feel free to write an article, make a note of something which piqued your interest, share a memory – we want to hear from you. Who needs to tweet or twitter when we can all share via Mechanical Music World?

Almost as if to underline this diversity, in this issue we have an article on organettes, a highly amusing automaton talking head – who will ever forget Fred after this introduction to a fascinating subject?

We seem to have 'started small' this time, with a delightful article from Juliet Fynes plus a more serious look at snuff boxes and manivelles.

As you read this, we shall be in the middle of our move to Vancouver Island and leaving Revelstoke after ten years of running our museum.

We hope you will enjoy this, our first edition of Mechanical Music World!

CONTENTS

Editorial ..... 1
Chairman's Report ..... 2
Foundation Day Meeting..... 3
Useful Hints..... 5
A Light Hearted Collection..... 6
Yesteryear..... 8
Snuffboxes - a Review..... 9
Magical Manivelle ..... 12
About Names..... 14
Farewell to the Nickelodeon Museum ..... 17
Introduction to Automata ..... 20
Want to Buy an Organette?..... 21
For Sale ..... 23

Officers of the AMBC

- Chairman Ted Brown 01403 823533
Vice Chairman Paul Bellamy 01634 252079
Secretary/Subscriptions Kay Brown
Treasurer Richard Kerridge
Meetings Secretary Juliet Fynes
Web Site Design Chris Fynes
Research & Publications Committee: Don Busby, Paul Bellamy, Ted Brown
Editors David & Lesley Evans 001 250 746 5652 mechmusicmuseum@aol.com

Feel free to contact any of us.

AMBC & Editorial Policy

The AMBC Editors welcome articles, letters and other contributions for publication. They expressly reserve the right to amend or refuse the foregoing if not in compliance with editorial guidelines. Opinions expressed by an author do not imply those of the editors or AMBC who disclaim any liability for errors, omissions, inaccuracies or the consequences thereof.

The AMBC and its editors disclaim responsibility for advertisements, product information, warranties and endorsements that are the sole responsibility of the advertiser or contributor to whom representation must be made.

Committees/Boards of other Societies may reproduce or edit AMBC publications subject to the permission of the Editors or in lieu the Executive and as confirmed in writing or by email. AMBC welcome reciprocal arrangements. Constructive comments including the identification of errors, additional material, correspondence, etc., is welcome for publication under AMBC editorial guidelines but contributors should ensure that such material does not breach copyright of a third party or that where appropriate the copyright holder gives Rights to Publication in whole or part.

An author's contribution as published by AMBC in any form including the AMBC website (ambc.org.uk) will be the copyright of AMBC. Contributors have absolute right to retain their intellectual property rights to the material contributed.

AMBC will make available any of its published material, subject to the above conditions, for the use of other societies and organisations provided that does not involve a profit motive. AMBC therefore wishes to collaborate with other like-minded organisations in research and publication to encourage interest by members of other Societies and of the public-at-large.

\*Note: As an Association AMBC does not give valuations or take responsibility for advice or guidance nor imply any form of guarantee for the accuracy or consequences arising from information so given.

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I am the chairman of this newly-founded Association, which has been formed to enable members to retain their interest in Mechanical Music, and to strengthen our ties with Europe and the USA. We hope to cover any type of mechanical musical instrument or automaton, both ancient and modern, in our Periodicals.

I started with my first box in my early thirties and have been collecting ever since. My interests are very varied and my collection ranges from Musical Novelties to Cylinder Boxes, Disc Boxes and Organettes.

Age, value or rarity should not be the criteria to go by. They are musical and should be enjoyed for their music, however simple or intricate the arrangements might be. Always buy what **you** like and let others buy the rest!

Collectively our membership has a wealth of knowledge on the history, restoration and repair of these instruments. Feel free to contact one of the committee members for information and expert advice.

We have written permission from the heirs of several former mechanical music experts to use their original articles, books and notes in any of our publications. This gives us the opportunity to cross-reference, review and produce articles with even more accuracy than previously printed. All use will be acknowledged.

As enthusiasts of all forms of mechanical music, our aims are to promote, inform and encourage fellow enthusiasts to collect, restore and protect these instruments for future generations. With these aims in mind we should do our best to share our knowledge, in any way possible, to protect them for posterity. Within our membership we have the information and skills to promote these aims to members and non-members alike.

The one thing we must not allow is the loss of the knowledge and experience we have built up over the years. The early knowledge of the manufacture of Musical Boxes and Organettes was not written down, it was felt unnecessary. Because no records had been made, it has taken the dedication of enthusiasts to research the original methodology, or find a modern, reversible, equivalent to restore these instruments to their former glory.

Remember it is your Association and we would appreciate any involvement or material we can use.

**Ted Brown**

### **Editorial and committee report.**

The hobby and fun elements have always been part of our interest and enjoyment. Thus we have to accommodate on equal terms both the serious collector and those who get satisfaction and enjoyment from the hobby and musical side of things. Some serious collectors have never abandoned this aspect of 'we can have fun' with the hobby and musical side, and we must make it more so. Attracting and educating 'the public at large' and a younger generation may be a daunting

task but we have much to offer and must make this a prime objective. Some may think we will lower our standards but AMBC has the 'bigger picture' in sight. Our standards will always be high even for the simple areas of collecting.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was at the heart of cylinder musical box home entertainment, expanding beyond domestic walls with the introduction of the disc musical box, only to be superseded by the 'talking machine' phonograph and gramophone. The lowly organette, the little organ, entered the market with its huge variety of popular music, both secular and religious. Player pianos and organs also had their place. Musical toys, novelties, and automata of both the musical and non-musical type also featured and they still do! Hence the Chanctonbury Ring sometimes has its silly season when battery-operated toys career across the table tops, clapping and banging away with their electronic gizmos and electronic 'musik', competing with the more sophisticated ones of yore.

Music has always been at the heart of entertainment. The musical box is only part of a genre encompassed by the words 'mechanical music' but is in fact a time capsule with its own unique place in history. AMBC aims to bring all these pre-programmed musical instruments to the attention of another generation.

### **The Constitution of the Association of Musical Box Collectors known as AMBC**

#### **Article 1. Aims and objectives:**

- 1.1. To promote interest within the body of membership of AMBC for the mutual enjoyment, entertainment and research relevant to musical boxes and all other associated forms of programmed musical instruments generally known by the term 'mechanical music'.
- 1.1. To establish formal links and working relationship with other Societies who wish to be associated with AMBC.
- 1.2. To provide social opportunity for meetings of musical and non-musical entertainment, of historical or social interest. Meetings may adopt the established format of the private Chanctonbury Ring meetings hosted by Mr. E. Brown.
- 1.1. To publish research, articles, books and pamphlets for members on all forms of musical instrument including musical and non-musical automata, covered by the term 'mechanical music', and in order to promote public interest.

**The Association of Musical box Collectors (AMBC)  
Foundation Day Meeting.  
22<sup>nd</sup> February 2015**

**Summary of Proceedings**

The meeting commenced at 11.00.

**Summary of the Opening address.**

The Chairman welcomed those present with apologies for absence of those unable to attend. Members present unanimously wished a speedy recovery for one of our friends who had been seriously ill. He asked those attending if they had received the information package containing the proposed Constitution, membership forms, membership cards, etc. *Confirmed.*

He explained his dilemma in trying to resolve the conflicts of interest within the committee of the society of which he was a life member whilst trying to meet the needs of those who had abandoned their former society in disgust at the conduct of its present executive and who had no alternative organisation that could meet their needs and interests. It was at their request that the concept of an Association was born, resulting in the massive support and the formation of AMBC with numerous generous gifts of money, commitments to loans, and membership fees received well in advance of this inaugural meeting.

He explained that the word Association meant that those who wanted to join would do so of their own free will and that many others in overseas societies had expressed an interest in building on fraternal links with AMBC.

He concluded with a statement that the heirs to past authors of books and articles had generously given AMBC both copy and unrestricted access to their work.

He then asked that the Events Secretary, also acting as the intermediary with others developing the website, to give a resume of that work, then for the deputy Chairman to make the concluding Committee statement before further question were asked.

The Events Secretary explained that the website was in an advanced state of development and the meeting venue and membership attendance confirmed.

The deputy Chairman then named the signatories to the accounts and that any member who wished to examine the accounts in detail would be afforded that opportunity. He stated that the bank had strict orders not to remove any signature from the bank mandate without the express permission of those signatories (compliances embedded in European law) and the approval of the full AMBC committee. Also, that new signatories must have the approval of the membership. An ordinary member of AMBC, a qualified accountant, had offered to independently comment, by way of audit, for the benefit of members.

He said that AMBC was an unincorporated body with the weakness that, as such, it had no legal status in English law. Thus openness, honesty and integrity of the committee was an expectation that ordinary members deserved.

Finally, he explained that the book 'the Music Makers of Switzerland' had been opposed by the committee of another Society, which refused to honour the contract already in place as well as refusing to reimburse considerable expenditure committed before its contested election. He thanked all those who underwrote the cost of its publication.

The Chairman then asked for approval of the draft constitution for a trial period of 12-18 months. *Granted.* He summarised the position that he, the AMBC committee and its members faced, as follows: Members had expressly left their former society of their own free will and did not consider that it was fair that members should benefit from membership of both societies. He restated that meetings at his premises had to satisfy his wishes as well as those of his wife. Those they had once trusted and welcomed had betrayed that trust. He had had enough stress and wanted a mutually friendly Association where everyone was willing to get on with everyone else. *Overwhelmingly approved.* A member of AMBC read out a letter from another of our friends who faced that dilemma of choice. The person chose to remain a member of another society, thus being able to continue to present certain strong views.

**The meeting closed at 12.00 noon.**

After a hearty lunch, the Chanctonbury Ring commenced with its usual Parish Notices followed by a wide range of instruments demonstrated by a number of members to the packed audience, one of the largest for some time. Proceedings started on a humorous note with a laughing, cymbal playing automaton monkey, setting the scene for a cheerful afternoon.



*Happy days are here again!*



*Ted Brown demonstrates an impressive Cuendet musical box of large proportions*

A member gave an interesting presentation on "Assessing a Musical Box" as to age and likely manufacturer by interpreting clues such as serial number, box construction etc. The company then listened carefully to a delightful little box with five out of the six tunes unknown. Unfortunately only one was identified. Another member demonstrated a glorious Ami Rivenc musical box once owned by the late HAV Bulleid.

A musical novelty, now some years old, was a small ceramic mug that, when lifted, played as if by magic. The mystery was then explained. The base concealed a battery operated electronic 'gizmo' that was disguised as porcelain and glued into a shallow recess, similar in principle to the cylinder movements fixed into the hollow base of a Crown Devon musical jug or mug. A scalpel scrolled around the edge enabled the glued item to be lifted out. The battery was replaced by one of similar size and voltage and then re-glued with a more soluble adhesive to facilitate future replacement. The secret was that the 'porcelain' was a translucent plastic. When lifted, even room lighting supplied sufficient energy to activate the music. What would the musical box makers of old make of their modern day musical box descendants?

Then a very fine giant of a Cuendet 'Sublime Harmonie' musical box was demonstrated. Its badly damaged tune sheet showed the same features as HAV Bulleid's

example 31 in his book 'Musical Box Tune Sheets' but its 'four post columns' were not draped as in the Bulleid example. How strange but then Cuendet seemed to use a whole variety of different tune sheets. The owner intended to copy and then use modern computer technology to electronically 'cut-and-paste' good parts of the tune sheet into the damaged areas. Thus the box would look fine with its replacement whilst keeping the remnants safely with the instrument. It was immaculately restored by a renowned restorer showing how important it is to rescue unique instruments for the pleasure of the next generation of owners. As the owner said, the restoration cost probably more than the instrument was worth but the satisfaction was worth the expenditure. There were no dissenting voices on that remark!

The afternoon ended with a selection of works by Strauss played by a variety of instruments.



*Auditor Richard Kerridge demonstrates a fine Langdorff musical box*

## AMBC Meeting dates

Please contact the host to ensure a place is reserved and for needs to be catered for. Also, please advise if a booking has to be cancelled so that places can be offered to others.

**6<sup>th</sup> June 2015:** AGM. 11.00-12.00 at The Old School, Bucks Green, Guildford Road, Horesham, West Sussex RH12 3JP. Tel: 01403 823533.

**6<sup>th</sup> June 2015:** Organ Grind Meeting. 12.00a.m. The Old School, Bucks Green. Bring visitors and guests to this popular and entertaining event to hear fine instruments and excellent entertainment. Host Ted Brown will supply drinks and 'pudding' but you must bring your sandwiches!

**6<sup>th</sup> September 2015:** Chanctonbury Ring Meeting at The Old School, Bucks Green. 10.30a.m. Gather for coffee/tea at 11.00. Bring visitors and guests to this popular and entertaining event. Host Ted Brown will supply refreshments and dinner free of charge. Members are invited to demonstrate instruments so contact Ted first, please.

**28<sup>th</sup> November 2015:** Christmas Meeting at The Old School, Bucks Green. 10.30a.m. Gather for coffee/tea at 11.00. Guests welcome. Host Ted Brown will supply refreshments and dinner free of charge.

## Projects & Wants, Questions & Answers

Please contact Ted Brown or Paul Bellamy. Letters to the Editors will also be appreciated. We will exercise our best endeavours to provide support, guidance and information to AMBC members, to associated societies and to members of the public. This will be given on an advisory basis only.



MANUFACTURE & RESTORATION OF MECHANICAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS  
SPECIALISING IN MECHANICAL PIPE ORGANS  
Playing By Perforated Cardboard Music  
**DEAN ORGAN BUILDERS**  
'The Music Box Shop'  
For new music boxes, musical movements  
& music box parts:  
[www.shop4musicboxes.co.uk](http://www.shop4musicboxes.co.uk)

For manufacture, service & repair of mechanical organs,  
organ parts & perforated music books:  
[www.deanorganbuilders.co.uk](http://www.deanorganbuilders.co.uk)  
Tel. 01274 834474

## Useful Hints from a Century Ago

### Nitrite of Amyl

A few drops of nitrite of amyl, it is said, have a powerful influence in restoring the functions of the heart in cases of drowning, hanging, or fainting. It is suggested, therefore, that it should always be used whenever attempts are being made to restore life to any individual apparently dead, or when it is desirable to settle the question whether a person is really dead or not. In ascertaining death the nitrite of amyl might be used along with the test of tying a cord around the finger. If the circulation has entirely stopped, the part beyond the cord never becomes any thicker; but if the circulation continues, however slowly, the fingertip beyond the ligature will sooner or later begin to swell.

### To prevent glue from cracking

Glue frequently cracks because of the dryness of the air in rooms warmed by stoves. An Austrian paper recommends the addition of a little chloride of calcium to glue to prevent this.

### Preparing Glue

Soften glue in cold water, and melt it in the water bath to form a very thick paste; to this add good glycerine in quantity equal to the dry glue taken, and continue the heating to expel as much of the water as possible. It may be cast on a marble slab to cool, and melted for use as required.

### How to loosen a screw rusted in

In order to do this, apply a blowpipe to the head of the screw, and it will presently yield to the pressure of the screwdriver. This is most effective in all obstinate cases.

### An automatic letter distributor

An automatic letter distributor is at work in Geneva. In the lofty buildings a common letterbox is fitted with compartments corresponding with each storey. When the postman puts the letters into this, an electric circuit is closed, and an electromagnet opens a valve whence water flows into a cylinder connected by a chain with the letterbox. As this ascends it discharges its letters at the proper flats, and on reaching the highest floor the water is discharged and the letterbox returns to the ground floor.

*From Amateur Work Magazine 1892*

## A LIGHT-HEARTED COLLECTION



*Fig 1: Sorrento ware trinket box*

We stumbled across our first musical box in the mid-sixties and were immediately smitten. Twenty five pounds changed hands, a not inconsiderable sum back then, exactly the same as our monthly mortgage payment, and rather more than my weekly salary as a newly qualified teacher. Luckily it was in working order but in need of some TLC. We bore it home in triumph and Chris set about stripping it down, cleaning the movement, dealing with the woodworm and polishing the case. We still have it, but relegated to underneath the table where it once took pride of place on top, which is now occupied by a much more exalted specimen. Chris's Grandmother, hearing of our new-found enthusiasm, bought us a musical decanter of exceptional hideousness for Christmas. We were horrified – call that a musical box? – and “lost” it as quickly as possible.

We acquired a few more boxes, joined the Musical Box Society and for several years enjoyed the London meetings until family and finances got in the way and our membership lapsed. Many years passed, several decades in fact, during which we never lost our early interest in musical boxes. Then belatedly we discovered that there was a regular meeting of like-minded enthusiasts, practically on our doorstep, at the Old School. We rejoined the Society, making new friends and thoroughly enjoying the Chanctonbury Ring meetings (nothing to do with treacle tart of course).

It was nice not to have to traipse up to London to participate, and I was particularly pleased to discover that there were now regular holidays. It was on one of these that I had my “light bulb moment”.

It was in a barn at the Milton Keynes Museum where Ted gave a talk on “Musical Novelties”. I had noticed what he calls these “nicky-nackies” dotted around the schoolroom, but in the presence of so many serious musical boxes I hadn't given them any thought. This talk suddenly endowed them with respectability. If they were good enough for Ted then they were good enough for me! I set about pursuing this new field of collecting with enthusiasm. In hindsight I should have kept the hideous decanter!

As soon as you embark on collecting these novelties you start seeing them everywhere. They are plentiful and cheap, so without some focus one could soon disappear under a mound of such stuff. There are many different types of musical novelty,



*Fig 2: Maypole dancing...*

but rather than concentrate on any particular type I decided to collect as many different ones as I could find. Probably the most prolific are actual boxes, for trinkets, cigarettes etc. You often see them in charity shops or flea markets for around a fiver. Many are made in Sorrento Ware, sometimes confused with Tunbridge Ware, although it is easy to differentiate between the two. The wooden tesserae forming the pattern are much smaller in Sorrento Ware and some are dyed in bright colours, whereas Tunbridge Ware uses only natural wood colours. Other common Sorrento Ware designs incorporate inlaid figures or a typical Florentine curlicue pattern incorporating birds and mythical beasts. This work is very attractive, good quality and, to my mind, undervalued, Fig. 1.



*Fig 3: Hedgehog and barrel organ*

Older examples are nicely mellowed, but the items being produced today, including small tables, have a glossy finish which I find unappealing.

I do like the rather jolly boxes with moving figures on carousels, seesaws and so on. These can be very modern, although they may look as though they were made in the fifties. A particular favourite broke my price limit, but at £17 I think it was quite good value as it has seven figures, three women circling a maypole and four men playing musical instruments, all in some kind of central European national dress, Fig 2, rear. I have several more, including a very modern one with a flat top on which two penguins with magnets in their bases used to whirl around to “The Skaters’ Waltz”. It



*Fig 4: Faux tortoiseshell mandolins*

looked quite cute until the cat stole the penguins. Musical movements may also be mounted in ceramic items, typically mugs and jugs. These are apt to cost rather more as they are made by factories such as Sylvac, Crown Devon and Carl-

ton Ware, which are collected in their own right. Some rarities can be very expensive in the context of musical novelties. Pottery beer steins are quite common and much cheaper but I don’t find them nearly as attractive. Probably because I have a penchant for English ceramics.

Another two of my small collecting interests coalesce in musical bears, especially Steiff. The Christmas before last my son gave me a modern one with a movement playing “Comme d’Habitude”, which seemed promising until we discovered to our horror that this translates to “My Way”, which has to be one of my least favourite musical box ditties up there with “The Last Rose of Summer”\*. Last Christmas he excelled with a little hedgehog (I think it’s Steiff) turning the handle of a barrel organ, Fig. 3. This was immediately promoted to be my favourite, displacing a small silver coloured model of a fair organ.

Getting back to the wooden examples, I have a very typical small box with a carved edelweiss on



*Fig 5: Shuco Pig Band members plus mice*

the lid and one of the carved Black Forest types of cake or fruit plates. I hadn’t gone out of my way to acquire one of these, as they take up rather a lot of space and can be relatively expensive too. Then one fell into my hands at the local “Posh Jumble” sale (not very posh, but slightly north of jumble). It was an amazing bargain at £3 and rather superior as novelties go, not only does it play two, but doesn’t switch off till the end of a tune. Many novelties have very low quality movements which stop in the middle of a tune and some annoyingly go on until they run down. Christmas biscuit tins

fall into this category.

Then there are all the various musical toiletry and cosmetic containers such as powder bowls, compacts and perfume bottles. These alone would make a fruitful area of collecting. The decorative china dressing-table powder bowls can be very attractive. Many novelties are made of plastic in all its forms. You see quite a few televisions made when plastic and TV were both in their infancy. My example sports a clock and a dancing couple inside the television; the nearest I have got so far to a gyrating ballerina in a jewellery box! Plastic imitation tortoiseshell is used to good effect in miniature mandolins, Fig. 4, and the like but I don't warm to the similarly made revolving gondolas.

Back in the early seventies Fisher Price made sturdy, brightly coloured musical toys for small children. There was a television, radio and record player with five interchangeable "records". Our daughter had all of these, which were inevitably got rid of when she had outgrown them, little did I realise I would live to regret this. I have managed to replace them all. They are now "retro" and therefore quite collectable.

It is bad enough that one's own childhood toys are now considered a respectable branch of antique collecting, but even more disconcerting to discover that our children's toys are rapidly heading that way too.

Fig. 5 shows five little spring-operated automata members of a band made by Schuco.

### Juliet Fynes

(\*Ed: *Oh dear, Juliet. The Last Rose of Summer* was the most popular tune in the cylinder musical box repertoire, along with Home Sweet Home. It is a romantic air, set to the music of a traditional Irish tune called *Aislean an Oigfear*, the Young Man's Dream, written by the Irish poet Thomas Moore in 1805. The words and music were performed together for the first time in December 1813 and sung 101 years later by the Edwardian 'charmer' Adelina Patti in 1906. She was one of the finest 'bel canto' soprano's of all time, acknowledged as such by Verdi.

Schuco toys are very collectable, particularly the automata type. Founded in 1916 as Spielzeugfirma Schreyer & Co., it was renamed Schuco in 1922.)

## Yesteryear

Mechanical Music World will feature topics from time to time that were recorded in the Victorian era. Technical innovation and knowledge was developing and rapidly spreading globally, creating growth industries as well as destroying others. The effect was dramatic, causing people to lose their jobs and to emigrate to other parts of the world. The AMBC book *The Music Makers of Switzerland* shows how some of these dramatic socio-technological changes affected the musical box industry. There was disease such as Typhus, typhoid, diphtheria and famine, which affected the music makers; the secrets of innovation were kept safe and hidden within a close community. Even now we have little idea about the formulation and composition of the composition snuffbox case and need modern technology of analysis if we want to know! If one reflects upon past times these phenomena continue in like manner. Here are some examples from the past, the 1890s, the time that the cylinder musical box was in decline, soon to be followed by the disc musical box:

"A new French explosive, Herenlite, is a yellowish-grey powder, composed of sawdust, camphor, nitrate of potash and several substances that are kept secret. It cannot be fired by sparks, flame or detonation. At a trial, a half-pound charge of the compound displaced a block of stone of thirty tons."

"The Cholera scare has sent up the prices of bleach and other chemicals to a high rate in the North of England chemical factories."

"Nottingham lace companies think that America is the place for the industry, and some are preparing to move their plant there. Nottingham mill lace machines are being shipped. Smart America!"

"The largest telephone switchboard in the world, at Berlin Exchange, has a connection of 7,000 wires."

"The Welsh tin-plate trade is depressed, and about sixty tin-plate works in South Wales are stopped. Large numbers of operatives have sailed for the United States of America, where new mills are being erected by Welsh proprietors. So much for the McKinley Tariff\*."

\*This was the 1890 US Congress Act framed by William McKinley that raised import duty to 50%. It was designed to protect US industry from foreign competition. The competition emigrated to the USA taking their skills with them. It was a major factor in the demise of the musical box industry as well as many others. The old saying is; "if you can't beat them, join them." And they did, in proliferation.

## Snuffboxes, a review of their history

### Part 1: Aubert, and Ivory plaque artwork

Before entering into any discussion concerning musical box snuffboxes, known also as tabatières, it is worth recounting the late HAV (Anthony) Bulleid's comments. They are interesting, humorous and very much to the point, if a little acerbic! - *"The L J Jaccard articles, written in 1938 when the author was 77 years old and printed by the Musical Box Society International, are both fascinating and tantalizing because they could have been so much better. Jaccard joined the musical box industry in or near Saint Croix when he was 16, in 1877, by which date he records most variants of the cylinder musical box had already appeared. Yet, to give just one example, he describes both Mandoline and Tremolo types as 'having many prongs tuned to the same pitch' but fails to make it clear that they are merely different names for the same effect. Of his apprenticeship years he is frustratingly short of vivid detail and I must confess I simply do not believe his claim that (in 1877-78) all musical boxes 'had all their cylinder pins bent forward, one after another, in order to place them in their correct position according to musical notation to make the different notes of their chords fall together in perfect unison'. What did he really mean when he wrote that? It is necessary to challenge obvious error lest it be added to the strings of traditional errors repeated by writer after writer.*

Jaccard is at his best and most valuable in recalling the names and expressions obviously long accepted in the musical box trade by the time he joined it. They were so obvious to him that he never thought of explaining their source. In cold fact, all cylinder movements with the spring arbor perpendicular to the bedplate, which were first made for snuffboxes, were simply called snuffboxes (tabatières). The others, with spring arbor parallel to the cylinder, were first made for clocks and were called Wall Clocks (Cartels). I must say I have not heard the latter explained, the French noun for cartel now being restricted to its second meaning, to antique wall clocks.

Anthony's wry humour, so often witnessed by the attendees of the Chanctonbury Ring meetings hosted by Ted and Kay Brown, is exemplified in another statement: *"It is quite a rarity to see a musical box correctly used as a period piece in a film and a good example occurs in Universal's 1957 production of Man of a Thousand Faces, a film biography of Lon Chaney, impersonated by James Cagney. In the 1905 period, a few years before Chaney started in pictures, the story demanded a small music-making item. A*

*tabatière-type musical box was quite wisely chosen and accurately recorded. A three-or-four-air tune sheet is glimpsed on its lid and the only technical error is that the box plays immediately when the lid is opened despite the on-off button seen on the front. Perhaps this is fair dramatic license, because the action demands the lid being slammed shut as an angry gesture to stop the music. Nearly full marks to Universal for doing it almost right"*

The above quotes illustrate the passion Anthony had about detail. Discounting the cartel movements for a moment, the tabatière-type seems to have been developed for that specific purpose, snuff. It justifies the unique layout of the movement for its key wind aperture in the bottom of the snuffbox case. Had the movement been in cartel form, the case would need to be much deeper to accommodate the snuff compartment and a side-wind key. Cases also have distinctive features with more-or-less-airtight snuff compartments. Thus the lid-to-case section in some types with tortoiseshell or composition cases is sealed by a tight continuous up-stand and the hinge is of the continuous interlocking leaf pattern. In metal-cased types the seal is formed as the lid is closed over the case. For the former, a semi transparent thin tortoiseshell cover is a common form of seal, curved to the outline of the movement and fused into the case sides. The latter usually had totally enclosed snuff compartments, invariably gilded if not of gold, mainly to prevent chemical discolouration by the snuff.

To depart slightly from the subject of snuffboxes, most know that tortoiseshell does not come from a tortoise but from its sea fairing cousin, mostly the hawksbill turtle. It took thousands of years before the creature became threatened with extinction, an endangered species, and was finally protected worldwide in 1973. The shell is large, has fine variegated colouration, quite translucent when of appropriate thickness, is malleable when heated, rigid when formed and durable. Elements of the shell can be readily fused. It is easy to carve and takes a fine polished finish. It is tactile and warm to the touch. Thus the poor creature became slave to the artistic and commercial bents of mankind.

It was also expensive. Too expensive for some, which led to the innovation of composition snuffbox cases, often with tortoiseshell internal covers. The carapace comprises the bony lumps, scutum, that were removed by heating the live creature's shell. These pieces were boiled in salt water and whilst hot, pressed flat. The pieces could then be welded together by means of a hot iron, taking care

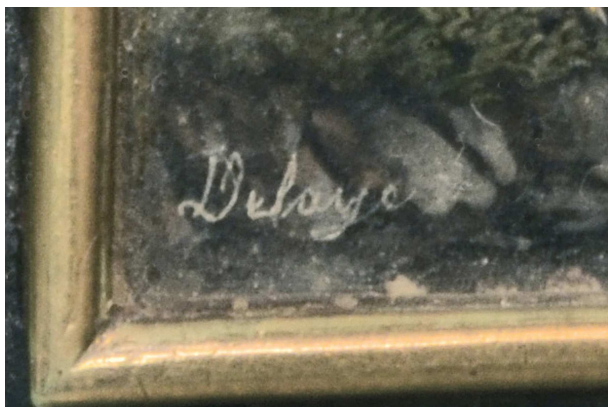


Fig 2: Delage's signature

not to overheat otherwise the colour could be damaged. It was nature's plastic and much better than mankind's version. More is known about tortoiseshell than its early 'plastic' successor, the composition snuffbox case. These were made of natural substances, animal and vegetable resins and glues, 'lampblack' (soot) and other sometimes forgotten ingredients. The mixture was heated and compressed in a mould. Thus, if the mould had an engineered pattern or fine engraving, copy after copy could be produced. The diminishing turtle population thus had some respite; costs were reduced, the artist only had to carve once in large profile, which was then translated and reduced in size mechanically onto a steel plate that became part of the mould.

It may be apocryphal that snuffboxes, particularly the composition variety, were rarely used for snuff, because there is little physical sign of snuff being present in surviving examples. For the earlier ones, in their fine cases of gilded silver, gold, tortoiseshell and finely decorated surfaces, it is most likely that many will have contained snuff but the disadvantage may have been the rather large-sized snuff compartment – ideal perhaps for offering to one's friends but not so for personal use. When makers supplied the much cheaper musical tabatières with composition cases, they would have been rather clumsy to transport and the key, if kept in the snuff compartment (there was nowhere else to put it) would inevitably introduced the dusty snuff into the works when winding. More of a pepper mill than a snuffbox! Thus the general consensus seems to be that they were rarely used for the habit and were basically miniature musical boxes of the cylinder kind. There was another type of movement used for snuffboxes called the *sur plateau*. This comprises a disc pinned on either one or both sides.

Snuff taking was a popular pastime compara-

ble to that other tobacco habit, smoking. It was popular with both men and women whereas smoking tended to be a male habit until more modern times when social restraints affecting gender equality were relaxed. Snuffbox collecting is a serious hobby but rarely seems to accommodate the musical variety. However, the musical snuffbox was popular throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century but was at its peak in the early part of that century. A relatively unknown Russian composer and highly talented musician, who, it is said, led a rather unreliable lifestyle, wrote a delightful piece of music called *The Musical Snuffbox*. He was Anatoly Konstantinovich Lyadov who was born in Petersburg in 1855 and died 1914. The popularity of fine musical snuffboxes was already in decline shortly before his birth but no doubt his high social status within the musical and social world of Russian Society would have been familiar to him. It is worth visiting the Web where performance of his fine piano miniature study can be heard and judged. Clearly, he was familiar with the nature and sound of a good quality musical box despite the fact that his composition (not a pun for the case of the musical snuff box) did not materialise until 1893.

The art of painting on ivory was that of the miniaturist artist. It has a long history going back to the decoration of books, certainly around the 1460s and beyond. The word *miniature* is derived from *miniare*, which means to colour with red lead. This was when the capital letters of texts were elaborately decorated. Portrait miniatures, which could be carried around and therefore provided a sense of status and wealth to owners, became popular in the 1850s, being elevated to the status of art appreciated by Monarchy and Royalty. The first recorded artist to paint on ivory was British artist Bernard Lens, circa 1780. Miniatures were first painted on velum but porcelain also became a popular medium. Most of the artists were self-taught amateur painters, including engravers. Ivory was not considered a natural medium for brushwork because of the difficulty in getting the water-based paint to adhere. This was overcome by the addition of organic material called gum Arabic, the sap of the acacia tree, which provided sap of suitable quality and consistency. The gum also imparted the effect of an oil-based paint.

The East India Company played its part in the popularity and profligacy of the miniaturist painters, mostly in the form of portraits. Thus, despite the skill required, labour costs were relatively low and by about 1800 the output was enormous. It is not surprising that the art form found its way into the decoration

of snuffboxes. Fig. 1 illustrates a very fine example on a musical snuffbox by Aubert. Sadly, the art was soon to die out when photography became the vogue. But, like the turtle, was appreciated by the elephant population, also rapidly diminishing by the actions of the hunter-gatherer – mankind.

By about 1839 most of the miniaturists had turned their attention to this new art form. The ivory was cut into very thin slices so thin as to be translucent, another feature that enhanced the quality of painting. These slices were then sun-bleached to make the material whiter. Pumice powder was used to slightly abrade the surface to give better paint adhesion. In addition to gum Arabic, gall bladder liquid, the bile, from bulls and cows, gave an easier flow to the paint. By 1860 there were commercial suppliers of brushes and paints to the miniaturist artist community. The famous supplier Reeves of London was amongst the foremost of the time.

In 1776 William Reeves opened a shop in Well Lane, near Saint Paul's Cathedral in an area called Little Britain, London, England. This is not the Little Britain of the two modern-day comedians David Walliams and Matt Lucas (Lou and Andy). It was a small historic part of London, near Saint Paul's Cathedral, comprising narrow streets and courtyards, named after its early owners, the Dukes of Brittany. Here, William Reeves' brother Thomas joined him in partnership and William's children helped in the business that thrives to this day. His speciality product was called Moist Watercolour Paint-Cake, made to a secret formula. It was recognised for its quality and won recognition from the Society of Arts, the precursor to the Royal Society of Arts.

Gum Arabic has its own interesting history, being a natural sap derived from at least two species of Acacia. Chemically it is a complex mixture of glycoproteins and polysaccharides. These are sugars



*Fig 4: Detail of boat*



*Fig 3: Detail of Delaye painting*

comprising arabinose (the other is ribose) from which the term gum Arabic derives. It remains a key ingredient to this day as a food stabiliser and viscosity controller in lithographic paints, inks, other paints, glues, textile prints and cosmetics. Thus, when one looks again at the marvellous work of the musical snuffbox painter, one can now marvel at the history, chemistry and artistry involved.

Fig 1 (see front cover) is a very finely painted and delightful rural scene; one wonders how so much detail could be accomplished in such a small space. Sometimes a brush with a single strand of hair was used to apply the paint. The more one looks the more there is to see. The man approaching the river or lake with his dog seems to be carrying a fishing rod, or is it a gun?, as does the man on the far side of the causeway leading off the bridge. Then there are the figures on the bridge and those of the ladies and their gentlemen rowing towards it. The nearby ruin has vaulted entrances to some hidden mysterious place but no doubt for access to storage and the interior of a once proud edifice. In the middle distance is the outline of a church with the sense of some town dwellings and in the further distant profiles of a mountain range. The waters are calm and there is a blush of pink to the blue sky, no doubt foretelling the onset of dusk. Finally, in the left bottom corner is the signature Delaye. The signature has been written with a blunt point to remove the paint and to expose the ivory beneath, Fig. 2

Fig. 3 reveals something different. This is not a fisherman but a man with a firearm of some proportion accompanied by his gun dog! No doubt looking for a once airborne creature to put on the dining table. Fig 4 also has a story to tell. The two rowers, one to each oar, pull strenuously but in which direction? Or are they just arresting the boat because the man



Fig 5: Detail of Bridge

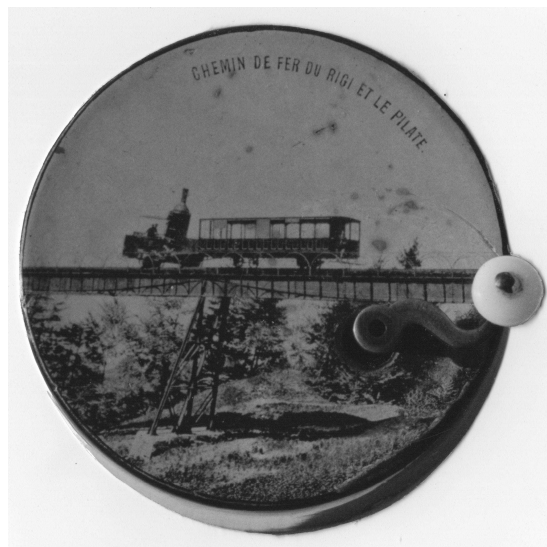
standing and the two-seated women are both looking and pointing, seemingly wondering what is inside the two entrances beneath the ruin. The third woman is facing in the direction past the viewer. Of course she is actually looking towards the gunman and his dog. The scene of the bridge shows three figures, one with a staff and his back to the others who are clearly holding a conversation. The central figure seems to have been fishing, a good location to catch fish that occupy and face upstream the waters passing under, feeding on the water's contents whilst fishermen hope to feed on *them*. The figure to the left also seems to possess a gun and is no doubt on his way home towards the distant town or village.

Charles Claude Delaye was born in Paris in 1793. He became a noted landscape and genre painter who exhibited his work between 1827 and 1843. This equates closely with the period that these ivory plaques appeared on snuffboxes, not that Delaye was the only painter supplying them. There is a record of a note from a Marie Nairac: "I inherited a small turtle shell box, on its cover is a reproduction of a drawing/painting in crayon of a view of the village of D'Ermenonville, Oise, France, and it was signed Delaye. Inside was a little note left by my great grandfather with a few details of the artist: Delay, Charles Claude, landscape and genre painter, born Paris 1793. He exhibited his work between 1827 to 1848". His works were: The Old Windmill in Beaumont, A Shack/Barn on fire, Hunting (Louis XIV period), The Teacher, Village Feast and the Stagecoach.

*Part 2 of this article continues with the further study of this unique Aubert movement. The AMBC publications committee is indebted to Chris Fynes for his photographs and photographic artwork plus his contribution of historical data concerning the artist Delaye.*

## The magical little Manville, Part 1

Angelo Rulli wrote an article on the history of hand-cranked musical boxes called manivelles saying they did not have their rightful place as quality instruments. The word is French for handle. He quoted *The Encyclopedia of Automatic Musical Instruments*, in the chapter on Adler and Fortuna Music Boxes: "A wide variety of instruments was produced during the late 1890's and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These included hand-cranked novelty or toy boxes, etc., etc." Whilst it is true that most of the manivelles were children's novelties, many were designed for the discerning ear and some as souvenirs. More were produced than any other type of musical box. In 2015, they are still made in profusion but the market has shifted mainly from Europe to Asia. It is so large that, unproven, production lines are said to run automatically for 24 hours, seven days a week. Whether true or not, it is a remarkable heritage of the Swiss musical box industry.



The manivelle has many advantages, particularly its simplicity and hence low production cost. No batteries, no springs, no need for a governor yet the speed can be varied to suit. Fast, slow, accelerando and rallentando. The brass cylinders were usually well made and were very skillfully pinned. Most had just one or two tunes but it was not uncommon to pin three or four tunes per cylinder, even six on rare occasions! Combs typically consisted of between 18 to 36/40 teeth.

The movement consisted of a cast base, usually alloy, with two integral pillars. The pillars were drilled and tapped horizontally to carry taper-tipped screws, one in each pillar, which entered cone-shaped axial drillings in the cylinder end caps. Thus, by adjusting the screws, the cylinder could be aligned so that cylinder pins tracked the comb tips. The combs were conventional,



just small versions of the standard cylinder musical box. They were soldered to an angled base sloping upward about 7 degrees and the assembly screwed to the casting, sometimes but not always with dowel pins. The drive-end cylinder pillar carried a screwed-down top plate to hold the vertical worm shaft that engaged with the cylinder drive gear, its Great Wheel. The shaft was topped with the winding handle.

One of the disadvantages of the early mechanisms is that they could be cranked in reverse, which caused the comb to be destroyed. The handles were screwed onto the endless spindle, thus meant to unscrew when wound in reverse because there was supposed to be sufficient resistance when comb pins contacted tooth tips to allow the handle to unscrew. A stiff screw spelt disaster because, when cranked in reverse, the cylinder pins bear down heavily on comb teeth, driving them down. Teeth break and cylinder pins also bend and sometimes break.

Other models had a simple clutch. It consisted of a horizontal pin at the top of the worm drive shaft. The hollow winding handle carried was slotted to drop over the horizontal pin. Chamfers in the slot allowed the handle to disengage when rotated in reverse. Often it seized and did not function as intended and again, disaster. Much later, a simple differential drive, similar to the drive to the wheels of a car, allowed the movement to be played whichever way the crank was wound. The only problem was that not all later models were so fitted.

Angello referred to other articles, one by Jackson Fritz: "For the Amusement Of Children-A Discussion of the Manivelle." Fritz noted that John E.T. Clark wrote that the manivelle was first produced around 1835. Tallis placed the date a little later at 1840, whereas Roger Vreeland wrote: "The L'Epée factory had about 30 workers in 1845." L'Epée probably became the biggest manufacturer of manivelles. By 1870 the firm had 300 workers making about 2,000 'grand models' and 40,000

petit (i.e. manivelle) models. Ord-Hume wrote: "There was one other significant development in small musical movements and this was the invention, in 1857, of the toy instrument, the hand-cranked manivelle. This was invented in France by L'Epée who was soon forced to increase his production capacity so great was the demand for this new product." Among past makers was the legendary Frank Margot of L'Auberson, Switzerland. Most of L'Epée's production was to supply Thibouville Lamy. Inevitably, Paillard also started production in this lucrative market.

There were two basic types of manivelle, the nickel-plated metal-cased round ones and the wooden-cased rectangular ones. Nearly all the movements were of the same type as described above. The metal ones comprised a cylinder with its top rolled inwards to form a lip. The top was closed with a metal disc upon which sat a picture held in place by the lip. A cardboard cylindrical sleeve inside the case was deep enough to sit between base and lid. The base was locked into position by means of indents pressed into the case, each engaging with a recess cast into the base. The base also had label pasted onto its underside. It was effectively a tune sheet, often illustrated with a picture and sometimes with the alphabet around its circumference. Hence an educational toy! Typical examples had a picture of a mother playing a piano to a child. The wooden types were more accessible with the movement screwed to a wooden base, itself screwed or pinned into the case.

It is always best to play the manivelle before buying. A few missing teeth may not be too noticeable but the damage was often so great that the tunes were unrecognizable. Even complete tunes were often unknown to the listener's ear! One should ask to see the movement if in its wooden case but the metal-cased ones are difficult to remove. On the rare occasion, the case of both the square and round ones may be made of *papier maché* or composition. A square one is shown in Fig 1. Usually black, the material may not be obvious. The round ones are usually fitted to the standard cast not by indents but by screws.

Why do the teeth break so easily? When the cylinder rotates and its pins engage with teeth, they do so near the tips. The pin then slides up towards the tip, lifts it and then disengages. In the opposite direction, the pin first slides down the tip, depressing it beyond its design and then slides back towards the tip, still depressing the tooth until it disengages. However, the tooth may have deflected too far and, overstrained, snapped off near its base. This is called a brittle fracture. In fact, most of the teeth can be broken off in one go. A disaster, because the cost of repair far outweighs the value of the movement.

The term manivelle should be reserved for these toys but there were many small and large hand-operated instruments such as street organs, barrel pianos, otganettes, disc musical boxes. Some of the 'true' manivelles were not toys at all but souvenirs and can be extremely rare. One example is circa 1874, celebrating the opening of the first Alpine steam-powered locomotive funicular railways to the Swiss peaks of Pilatus and Rigi, Fig. 2. Pilatus has several peaks overlooking Lucerne and Rigi was known as the Queen of the mountains, also overlooking Lucerne and was the first to have a cogwheel (rack and pinion) mountain railway. Thus, this souvenir with its *papier maché* round case and original photograph is very rare indeed. The Verkerhaus Museum (the Swiss Transport Museum) of Lucerne has the original newspaper articles and photographs in its archives showing the vertical-boiler engine and integral coach with the driver and the guard as well as pictures of the station and railway sheds.

The manivelle has had a modern day revival in the form of a comb-playing musical box. Some are not cylinder movements but more in the tradition of a disc music box using a punched paper strip. The handle winds the strip forward into a series of 'star' wheels, one for each comb tooth. As the punched hole approaches its star wheel one of the wheel's cogs enters the hole. Further progression causes the star wheel to rotate and an adjacent partner cog on the wheel lifts and releases the tooth. These modern versions give scope to the hobbyist and there are some fine examples of what can be done, even to coupling the drive to operate an automaton. There is a range of sizes, some as small as twelve teeth but up to 20. They are tuned chromatically and comprise at least one octave, sometimes two. The movements may be supplied with a pre-punched tune as well as a code for punching set tunes onto blank strips. The musically competent owner can arrange tunes to suit. One disadvantage is that most tunes are in the 'major' scale. However, with two octave combs, the cunning arranger can select one of them and re-tune one or two teeth to introduce 'accidentals'. With a bit of musical imagination tunes with both major and minor keys, plus a bit of modulation (i.e. change of key), can be accomplished. Perhaps more of this in a later edition of the Periodical.

**A Publications Committee production with thanks for members' input.**

## All about names, Part 1

There were a number of innovations in the development of the cylinder musical box even before the end of Bulleid's 'Golden Age', which he thought ended about 1860, the time when the key-wind cylinder movements were replaced with lever-wind ones. The most obvious ones were the spring damper and lead weight. The damper allowed notes to be repeated quite quickly and the lead weight permitted a greater scalar range. Both drove the desire for more complex and longer lasting music. Longer lasting was fairly easy to achieve by increasing the diameter of the cylinder. More complex meant more teeth and hence a longer comb. Thus the segmented comb became obsolete as larger pieces of comb steel became available. Examples of the segmented combs up to 6 inches long are known about 1816 and they continued for about another twenty years before good quality larger pieces of comb steel became the norm. They came on the scene as early as 1825 but it was to be a few more years before the segmented comb became obsolete.

Mandoline effects were not exclusive to cartel movements. A 4-air snuffbox-type movement circa 1860 has a 4-inch cylinder and 86 teeth. The tune sheet describes it as *Mandoline Extra*. The close tune track width, slightly less than 0.012inches, allows more teeth for the same length of comb. The term *Extra* is justified because the mandoline groups have up to 8 teeth. A standard movement with 4inch cylinder of this type has tracks 0.017inches wide and about 58 teeth.

The mandoline effect was first used on earlier snuffbox type movements, finely cut but still quite small. Damage to these small combs during manufacture meant a waste of time and money but labour was cheap and ways were soon found to repair a broken tooth or two and hence to save the comb. It pays to look very closely because what may appear to be a repair after manufacture is often an original repair before the item was sold. There were two basic methods, both involving an L shaped root to the tooth. A vertical slot was cut into the comb stock at the root of the broken tooth and the L portion carefully shaped into a tight fit. The shape may be of rectangular section or in the form of a chamfer. They were probably filed to

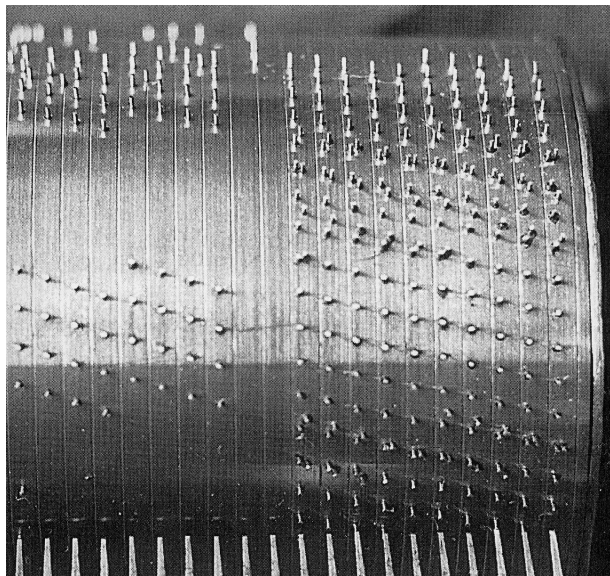


Fig 1: Treble Mandolin effect

slight taper then hammered down until the top of the replacement tooth was level with the comb surface. Although hardened and tempered, the tooth metal was still capable of deformation when struck. HAV Bulleid noted that the body of a steel comb had, after hardening, been tempered so that it was slightly more malleable than its teeth, typical of his close observation and technical analysis. Then a small punch was used to spread the metals together so that when polished the joint was almost invisible. This is clear to see when the comb is removed and its underside inspected, where the deformation, called peening, is usually clear to see.

The first name to appear was the *mandoline* form of pinning, not necessarily known by this name at the time. By 1830 large mandoline movements were becoming popular but the idea was not new, appearing on snuffboxes and small cartels much earlier. The idea was to repeat a note in rapid succession, impossible for a single note but not when several were tuned to the same pitch and played in succession. This form of musical embellishment, sometimes in the form of a two-pitch trill, added colour to a musical arrangement, hence the word *coloratura*. This is the Italian word for florid singing, particularly for the soprano voice.

The simple trill was used in musical arrangements such as the *ranz des vaches*. These were popular folk tunes used as a means to illustrate a vocal form that had more practical applications. The

vocal trill, called the yodel, and the Swiss mountain horn were both ‘musical’ devices for communication rather than entertainment. Thus the *ranz des vaches* were songs for calling cattle down from cold, high mountain pastures to the protection of the valleys. The cylinder was usually pinned with a ‘vocal’ descant trill. Similarly, the other means of such communication was the deep-voiced giant Mountain Horn, hardly suitable though for the musical box!

Most cylinders with *mandoline* have a distinctive pattern consisting of a sequence of pins that form helical patterns. The terms *Mandoline*, *Tremolo* and *Trill* can be mutually inclusive depending on how long the effect is sustained. Nicole did not use the term but made them between the mid 1850s to the mid 1870s. These were mostly 6 and 8-air movements with the occasional 4 and an astonishing 20 air two-per-turn movement serial 44449, circa 1870. Charles Brun, the Nicole successor to that name had a few in the Nicole 50,000 series from about 1844 to 1884 to 1888. A distinguishing feature of François-Charles Lecoultre *Mandoline* musical boxes is that the effect is pinned in a different manner to practically all other makers. He starts with the treble-end tooth first so that the helical lines are angled towards the governor, opposite to that of other makers.

A really good *mandoline* effect requires about 8 notes per second, utilising several carefully selected groups of principle notes in the musical score. Bulleid coined the term *Super Mandoline* for these. Nicole, Langdorff, Lecoultre and some unidentified makers made *Super Mandoline* movements. Here, instead of a series of short

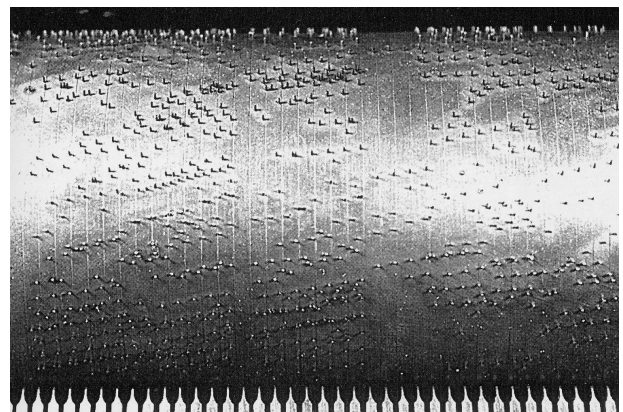


Fig 2: Surface of an Organocleide

mandoline trills, the effect can also be considered as that of a continuously sounding note depending on how the trill is pinned. The slope of the pinning can be such that as soon as the last pin is plucked the first tooth starts again. Is this meant to be a sustained note rather than a conventional mandoline trill? Typically, mandoline combs have about 200 teeth. Although most of the un-identified *Super Mandoline* musical boxes have no identification marks on their movement, one musical box had a tune sheet marked E & APf, for Eugene & Ami Paillard, the 'f' may have been for *fecit*, i.e. meaning: 'he/she made it' but more probably for frères. Can anyone confirm this point, please? An example is TSB22 in Bulleid's Tune Sheet Book.

There were some poor examples that tried to simulate the mandoline market. For example, a late Jules Cuendet *Interchangeable* movement with only 92 teeth claimed *Mandoline Piccolo* on its tune sheets for each of three cylinders. A fourth cylinder's tune sheet was headed *Mandoline Piccolo Basso*, almost an impossibility for such a few teeth, particularly at the bass end of the comb. This introduces the term *Organocleide* but more of this a little later. Another late term is *Mandoline Expressive* actually mixing two effects, *mandoline* and *Sublime Harmonie*. Langdorff used the term *Concerto Tremolo* for their *Sublime Harmonie Tremolo* movements.

The *Organocleide* is one of those extraordinary, nonsensical, marketing terms meant to infer the sound of an organ. It is really a marketing expression, indicating something special yet confounding most that see it! It combines the possible etymology of the two parts, *organ* (Latin, *organa*, Greek *organon*) and *cleide* (Greek *kleidos* for 'key'). Thus Ami Rivenc was one of those to exploit a cylinder with the bass tooth starting the *mandoline* sequence. The slower reverberations of bass teeth intermingle as they repeat, simulating what was intended to be the sound of a bass organ pipe. Fig. 1 illustrates the cylinder surface pattern. Others used different terms for the same purpose such as *Mandoline Basse* and *Mandoline Basse Piccolo* and *Baryton*.

Thus the *mandoline* style of pinning had several applications and lasted for almost the entire period of the cylinder musical box. By 1840 Nicole

Frères introduced a new innovation, the *Forte Piano* effect using one comb for the *forte* (no louder than a conventional comb) and another for the *piano*. About the same time, the two Lecoultré brothers, David and Henri, introduced their single comb version using long-and-short pins.

About 1845, additional accoutrements were introduced by way of drums, bells, and castanets. At first they were hidden away in the bowels of deep cases but later rose to appear in view, giving rise to the two terms such as 'hidden bells' and 'bells in view'. Not always an improvement in musical quality! Earlier examples had no way of switching off these additions and Bulleid was rarely appreciative of the drum but more so the bells. This was also almost the beginning of musical box automata with flying bees, butterflies and not-so-flying mandarins striking the bells in view. Levers also allowed the drums and bells to be switched off, thus returning to the arrangement just played on the comb. Comb teeth were used to actuate all these additions. They were not tuned but flexible enough to carry levers and cranks that connected the tooth to its striker, whether to bang the drum or strike the bell. Just like the mandoline effect, a whole series of these teeth were needed to give a drum roll. Not so the bells, which usually had two strikers each.

Bell musical boxes can be categorised into two distinct types, those with a lot of bells that are capable of playing simple tunes in duet with the comb and those with less bells used more for accompaniment. Depending upon the musical arrangement, they can be very charming in either form. Later, though, the situation worsened with just a few bells that were more or less used as a form of percussion. Even so, they have their place in musical box history and should be treasured for what they are.

By 1879 the first *Longue Marche* patent taken out and by 1882, another innovation appeared, the first *Plerodienique*. More of that in Part 2.

## The Editors' Farewell to the Revelstoke Nickelodeon

It was a shock – a great shock – when we finally looked at each other over breakfast and agreed that we should move. When the wagon trains bringing the collection from the UK arrived in Revelstoke, Canada this was to have been its final destination and yet here we were planning one last move – again.

Ten years have passed since the Revelstoke Nickelodeon came into being. We have had the joy of introducing thousands of people to the wonderful world of mechanical music and being richly rewarded in return by meeting amazing people and being able to appreciate our own collection while enjoying the public's reaction to it. No two days were ever the same and the memories are fantastic.

I had been quite apprehensive about our first coach party – we were after all very new to the entertainment business – and a party of thirty plus American seniors were booked in. Oh my goodness – they were seniors too. Walkers, wheelchairs and sticks everywhere. Of course they fell under the spell of the music and the last half an hour of their visit they found the juke boxes and they danced. Oh how they danced! All over the museum, in the gift shop, in the rest rooms, anywhere there was space, in groups or on their own, they danced. As they were preparing to depart, I overheard one of the men say to a helper "I'm not sure I'll be safe on the bus with all these hormones racing." The terse reply had me doubled up. "Aw, sit on the back seat and enjoy it!" The walkers and other equipment were gathered up and returned to their owners and serenity (and sanity) descended on Revelstoke once more.

At the other end of the scale there was our first school party. It was a school choir, travelling from a High school in Calgary to a competition in Vancouver and staying overnight in Revelstoke to visit us. (This is quite a marathon trip for a school visit – like London to the south of France for a choir competition?) Again, I was slightly worried about how things would work out but my fears were groundless. The teenagers were absolutely absorbed not just by the music but by the mechanisms. The dancing began with the barrel organs, continued through the Can-Can on the De Bain planchette piano, through the piano players to the Banana Tree dance organ and thence to the juke boxes. A lovely, lively enthusiastic group, perfect for our first experience of adolescents *en masse*.

Just a day or so after we opened to the public a couple came to the museum who stood out as fellow

collectors. Bruce and Bonnie came from Enderby (a mere hour and a half away, next door by Canadian standards) and he collected antique pianos and reed organs which he restored to playing condition. Then he played. Oh my word, he played our Aeolian pipe organ and my heart stood still. From nowhere a musical genius had appeared. We began talking about organ concerts and a firm friendship began. Then he and Bonnie reluctantly left us to continue their holiday travels. It was therefore puzzling that we heard no more from them for over a year. Then one day Bonnie appeared and shared with us that Bruce, so fit and vibrant and full of life, had died suddenly only two days after visiting – but had had two wonderful days of great happiness and anticipation of things to come to. Thank Goodness, we do not usually have that effect on our visitors, but Bruce was a great character and it was a privilege to have met him and heard him play. Bonnie remains a friend and museum volunteer, a great cook and supporter of our endeavours.

Reflecting on people who play reminds me of Sarah and Ken. Opening to the public means just that. You'll never know who will visit. On this occasion it was a quiet English couple who said they had an interest in music – as well as white water rafting. It was on their third visit, by which time we had become quite friendly, that Ken mentioned that Sarah played the organ professionally. We persuaded her to have a go on the Hammond Electronic and she romped through every title of song that we could name, in true theatre organ style. It turns out that she is – in Terry Wogan's words on his radio show – "everybody's favourite lady organist". She certainly is ours! It was in an exchange of emails between us that I learned something which surprised me and maybe is news to you too. She had just come back from an ice skating session and had got talking to an older gentleman there and to their mutual surprise discovered they both had not only visited the Nickelodeon but were friends of ours. It was, of course, Paul Bellamy. Sarah was so impressed by him – I quote "he had only been going skating for a few weeks and he was really good. He could go backwards and everything!" A very versatile couple of friends – does Paul go white water rafting too? Or are there other secrets yet to be revealed?

We have had many, many Dutch visitors over the years and have been shocked at how few of them even know of their National collection, Museum



*Liane de Keijzer and her street organ*

Speelklok at Utrecht. We must have sent thousands of visitors including one delightful family who only this Christmas have sent us pictures of themselves in traditional costume and operating their latest street organ. Leo and Liane de Keijzer and their son Lee were travelling around Canada on holiday when they stumbled across us. They made a very enthusiastic audience for our tour and demonstration of our instruments, especially liking the Bursens Banana Tree dance organ. So much so that they returned to Holland from their holiday in Canada and set about acquiring their own Dutch street organ and joining the ranks of entertainers and collectors. We still hear from them regularly – they have just acquired a Trueman busker organ!

We have always enjoyed visits from the people in the Cottages in Revelstoke. The Cottages are attached to the hospital and on fine days during the winter occasionally a special ambulance bus will bring down the residents to the town for visits. This particular visit was truly memorable. We were having our usual fun with the instruments and had reached the Philipps Pianella xylophone piano. The wheel chairs and residents were in a big semicircle so they could all see, about a dozen of them plus family and staff. The lights came on on the Philipps together with “She’s got Eyes of Blue”. One of the very frail elderly ladies had been dozing, head drooping and bleary eyed. At the start of the music her head jerked up and she was fumbling at the wheels of her wheelchair. It reminded me of an old war horse hearing Reveille. I shot over and moved her to the keyboard and to the amazement of us all she accompanied the roll. The memory still brings a lump to the throat. As I said to the group at the end of the performance, “nobody will ever hear that instrument play that roll like that again”. It was a scintillating performance. The stunned look on her

son’s face said it all.

Soon after this we acquired another family member. I was quietly in the shop while David had people in the museum when a sheriff’s car parked outside. These are highly visible vehicles, no plainclothes jobs. Then the sheriff appeared – fully uniformed and armed and with husband. (I was slightly alarmed by this time). She came in peace fortunately and we all had a lot of fun. As she was leaving she decided that she was going to be a relation of ours, and so we now have Cousins Shona and Danny! They have offered to help us with the move as well as restoration work on a volunteer basis. I do wonder what the neighbours think when the car gets parked outside and we have frequent visits from the sheriff.

One of the musical items which has given great pleasure to the public over the years has been our musical chair. It is a very small, beautifully carved one, bought on our behalf at auction by our friend Barry Wilson, as we were on holiday when it came



*Liane de Keijzer and Trueman busker organ*

up for sale. I call it my Grandmother's Chair, because I believe every grandparent should have one! We will never forget the day David was taking round a rather large group of people which had included a small girl. A true three year old Shirley Temple look-alike, curls, huge eyes and a big smile. She had been very well behaved and David produced the chair with a flourish and asked her to try it for size. To her amazement and delight it played music. She stopped us all in our tracks, however, when she announced, in a particularly clear treble voice, "Oh, it makes my butt tingle – and I like it!!!" How David followed that I don't know, for I was too busy laughing....

Then there was the Apple man. A computer man of extraordinary talents. Steve Jobs had employed him to work at the Apple factory. He was employee number 114. Mr Jobs was quite frank, telling him that he would have a job there until he was burned out and then he would be sacked. Tom made the first Apple sign for the factory from a fluorescent light fitting and cut-out letters. Sure enough, he got burned out and sacked. As an aid to his recovery he took up gardening – rose growing became more than a hobby and now his company is the biggest rose bush producer in California. Isn't there an old adage about not being able to keep a good man down? He writes poetry – we still have the one he wrote after his visit to us and another arrived this Christmas.

The last memory I am going to share with you still causes me to grin and shake my head. The Mayor popped in to check that it would be OK to bring the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia in for a few minutes, if there was time, on her impending visit to Revelstoke. All very informal. We heard nothing more until David was in the middle of a tour with a group of American visitors when The Honourable Iona Campagnola erupted through the door. She was accompanied by an enormously tall policeman and a smaller man in a kilt – as well as the Mayor, the Member of Parliament and the local press. The poor American visitors could only stand and stare as the lady took centre stage. We had not been able to pre-warn them as we didn't know ourselves. The policeman was a commanding presence, covered in gold braid, the Scotsman was her personal piper and chauffeur and the rest of us fell into line behind her. She was supposed to visit for 5 minutes or so. Half an hour later she was still with us and in no hurry to depart. While she was talking about the instruments with David I took the chance to explain to the other visitors what was happening. They were suitably



*The Honourable Iona Campagnolo, former Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia*

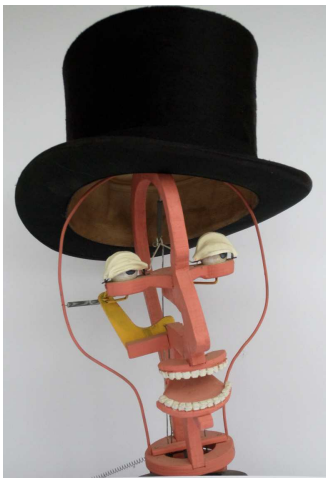
impressed by the Queen's representative in British Columbia and were very kind and cooperative over the disruption to their visit. However they were nearly my undoing that when one of them whispered loudly in my ear "But who's the guy in the skirt?"

So many memories. Books of names and comments, the lives we have touched and who in turn have touched ours. But the time has come to begin another chapter. We expect to still share the collection but on a reduced scale – not seven days a week. We expect to be able to join with members of the MBSI in the North West and attend conventions. We still have several instruments to restore and we are looking forward to spending more time in the workshop.

We shall miss Revelstoke. The friendships we have made, the beauty of the mountains and surrounding area. The ten years have flown past and with the years the mix of joys and sadness and unforgettable people – it has been a great life but here we are, planning one last move and facing whatever life has in store.

## An introduction to automata

The late Lyn Wright had a fascination for automata. He collected and restored many items and was meticulous in recording photos of his work. His heirs have kindly donated all of his works for the exclusive use of AMBC. He also produced many models to demonstrate the basic function of cams, levers, cogs, cranks and links that the automaton makers of old used. One of his most amusing demonstration models was called Fred the Head.



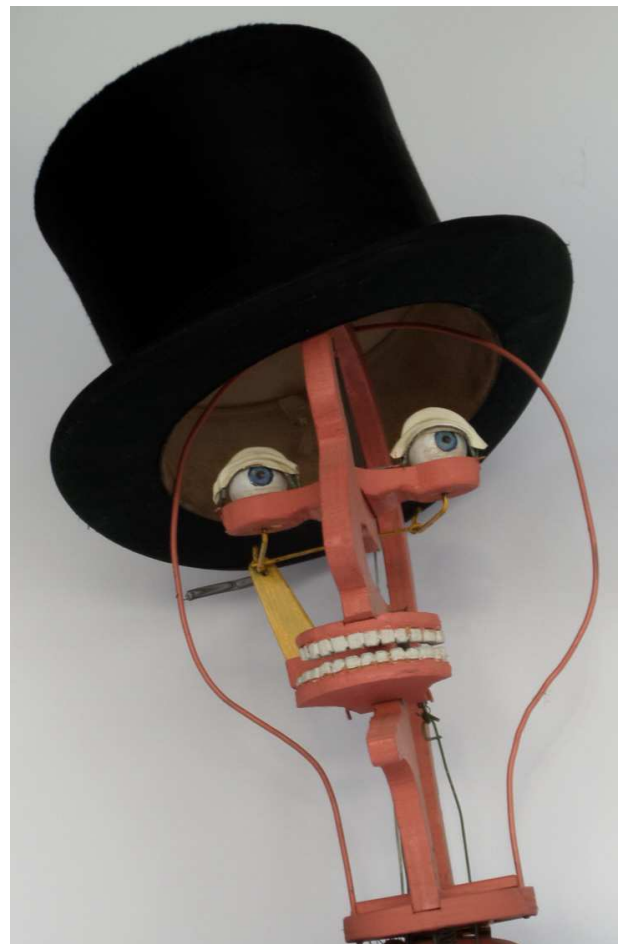
*Fred the Head*

In later issues of this periodical, the Publications Committee will address the subject of automata. An automaton is closely related to the musical box, to clocks & watches, organs, etc. The mechanisms mostly derive from those of ancient times including 'dancing fountains', public and religious clocks, as well as for scientific use as in the orrery and other similar machines. Just as the watch and clockmaker's art reached a peak in mechanical ingenuity and presentation, it did so almost in parallel with the development of automata and thus easily translated into the era of the musical box. It continues today. Cheap 'dancing doll' novelties, whether spring or electric motor operated, are direct descendants. They can still be highly entertaining as well as extremely annoying when the target of amusement is the child who insists on playing repeatedly some of the ghastly modern 'musical' examples. These are the 'Mr. Magoo' examples, designed, one suspects, to annoy. We hope our survey will cast another light upon this huge topic, providing interest and practical examples to today's hobbyist, like Lyn. There are many examples hidden amongst the collecting fraternity. The most sophisticated of historic examples have been described many times and are well beyond the means of most but little attention has been paid except by just a few of the musical box fraternity.

Thus, to introduce future articles on the subject of automata, both musical and non-musical types, we introduce Lyn's *Alta Ego*, Fred the Head. So let him speak for himself:

Hello folks, my name is Fred  
Known to all as Fred the Head  
To get ahead one needs a hat  
And one can't really argue that!  
You see I am an empty head  
But pull the strings and from the dead  
I come to life, a tale to tell,  
Not dead at all but live and well!

Before I go I must disclaim  
I had no choice about my name.  
T'was Lyn who made me up from scrap  
Who thought the name would be quite apt.  
In next edition there's more to tell  
So now I'll bid you all  
Farewell



*Fred the Head again*

## SO YOU WANT TO BUY AN ORGANETTE?

Firstly do you want it for street playing or to be put in your collection for occasional playing? Organettes, although between 70 and 100 years old and still working, do experience wear on them and the music if played for long periods and not checked regularly. Labels and instructions can deteriorate rapidly in the sun. The case work and music don't like the damp.

Right – you have decided. Ask around, get advice. Does it have sufficient volume for your use? When you think you have seen what you want, let that first rush of blood to your head subside. You need to look at it objectively. Will you be happy with the condition of the case? Bits of string, chewing gum and epoxy resin might not hold up to two or three hours of continuous use. Are you prepared to evict that large colony of woodworm squatting in the case? Have they been wandering through the reed block giving additional airways, so you can hear unusual chords instead of single notes as the air rushes from one main airway to another? Repairs cost money and take time. Masking tape does not usually point to a permanent repair.

If you have seen that particular make of organette in regular use it is probably fairly robust. Most organettes were made for the masses and were priced from around 10/6d up to about 8gns. Like now, you only get what you pay for. The cheap ones had card bellows with leather reinforcing and the cranks were stiff leather or wire. They have lasted very well but should be treated with some respect. They are fairly easy to repair and not too expensive to buy. The dearer ones take longer to repair and therefore cost more when in good condition.

Well there it is, sitting in the shop or auction room. Is it a common make? If so there is no problem getting extra music and you should have an idea of its quality. Is it an uncommon make? If it is, does it have a supply of music rolls or discs? One tatty strip of half of "Onward Christian Soldiers" does not constitute a good selection of tunes but may mean you can at least try it out. If there is



*A rare Autophone Organette*

no music does anyone you know have music they are prepared to lend you for copying, or is there anyone who can arrange music for you? Organettes with no music may look pretty but people do like to hear them play occasionally.

If you don't know whether it is a common make or not then you shouldn't be buying it – yet. A browse through one of the books specialising in organettes will tell you when that make was made. Remember the first thing people will ask you is "how old is it?". You can find out where it was made, how common they were, and often how much they first cost to buy. By talking to other collectors or owners you can find out how robust they are, and perhaps hear them, or play them yourself.

There are two basic types of organette. The first, and most common, is the "paper as a valve" type. These have no mechanical noise and very little that can wear out. The second type has a keyed system, where keys are operated by the music to open and shut the reeds. These have many more moving parts.

The types of music vary. Discs can be played over and over without the need of changing them, as can endless bands, but bands are more tricky to change. A roll of music contains several verses or tunes that can be played before changing.

**Does it play well?**

Play two or three tunes if you can. The tune already on it may only use the notes that work. Other tunes will show up some of the defective notes if there are any. If some notes do not play it might be a bit dusty or, like one I picked up that must have belonged to the owner of a Burmese cat, as it was bunged up with long fine blue-grey hairs. Dust or fluff can be removed. Damaged or missing reeds are not so easily rectified. Odd reeds can be repaired or replaced; a complete missing bank of reeds is a little more difficult to overcome, especially if you don't know the tuning scale.

### **Does it have enough puff?**

If it is a bit wheezy it could just need resealing round the top, winding handle or case. But it could mean the bellows or even the whole pneumatics need re-doing. If you can't tackle this repair yourself it can be expensive to have it done properly, as it is time consuming. Remember this when looking at the price. Most small organettes, using paper as a valve, work on two, or occasionally three, bellows or exhausters that inflate or exhaust a reservoir. If you are at an auction place your catalogue firmly over the tracker bar, or slot that the paper tracks over, and wind the handle. There should be some resistance as each feeder sucks or blows. Check that there is no damage along the slot, on the reed block or on the tracker bar between the notes as this will cause more than one reed to sound. This can be rectified, but again takes time.

### **Is the reed bank sound?**

Any loose reeds, any splits or warping, again make extra work.

### **Is there any rust?**

Any rust means the organette has been in the damp, and this could mean possible damage to the reeds if they are steel; tacks round the bellows and steel bits could be rusty. It will certainly need stripping down later to stop further damage.

Larger or more expensive organettes that use paper as a valve, like the Seraphon or Celestina, have individual pneumatic motors for each note, which gives a much prompter sounding of the reeds and uses smaller holes in the music. The biggest prob-

lem with these is the bleed hole on the motor getting blocked with fluff. The reeds still sound but don't cut off so promptly. The only way to clear these is to strip it down and remove the fluff. Defective reeds are usually easy to get to. Any defect with the pneumatics takes time and, if it has to be done by a professional, costs money.

Organettes that operate the reeds mechanically, the Atlas, Ariston, Cob Roller organ etc, are often badly adjusted. Check the tails on the Roller organ pallets. Occasionally one or two get bent or broken. They can be repaired. Bad adjustment just means a little thought and a lot of time if it has been played about with. Make careful notes before touching anything, then if you get it wrong at least you can get it back to where it was before you tried to adjust it. These mechanical organettes have leather covered pallets that seal the entry to the reeds until they need to sound. These may need adjusting so that they just close. They may need recovering if woodworm or moths have been wandering about. The work is straightforward but you may have to completely strip down the organette if it is an Ariston or similar. If the pallets or linkage have too little movement to seal the reeds, the discs or music will get worn or tear, even with zinc discs. The linkage will also get bent or strained. If there is too much movement the reeds will not be sealed and you will hear some very unusual chords being sounded. Before you do any dismantling make a sketch and remember long screws go into deep screw holes and short screws go into shallow screw holes. Always replace leather with leather (same type, same strain). Draught excluder and sticky tape do not make a good repair. It would have been invented years ago if it did and before you glue something up, think. You might want to take it apart again one day.

Don't be put off buying your first organette by all these potential problems. Armed with this information you should be able to avoid the worst of the pitfalls and have an idea of how to tackle the problems that will inevitably arise. And never be afraid to ask for advice, you will find people only too happy to share their hard-won expertise.

*Ted Brown*

## FOR SALE

# The Music Makers of Switzerland

Author, Paul Bellamy

This high quality, hard cover, limited edition book is dedicated to the late HAV Bulleid, author of Musical box tune Sheets (The Tune Sheet Book) and other major works concerning cylinder musical boxes. It will be 12" (30cms) x 8.5" (22cms) with about 250 pages, 875 illustrations and 350 references\*.

Publication date: Mid-to-late of 2015. No deposit required. The price is yet to be decided but expected to be £45-65 or \$/Euro equivalent plus postage and packing, depending on orders.

### Summary of Chapters:

Introduction - A stroll around Geneva. A modern journey into the past.

Chapter 1: The freedom and development of Switzerland - 1815.

Chapter 2: More about François Nicole, Nicole Frères and their heirs.

Chapter 3: The Lecoultries. The two Lecoultrie branches are reviewed in alphabetical order.

Chapter 4: Other makers and agents of Geneva and the Joux Valley. An alphabetical list of agents and makers describing their lives and work.

Chapter 5: The Paillards. The two main branches are listed in date and family order describing their lives and work.

Chapter 6: Makers and agents of St.-Croix and its environs (including Berne, Lausanne, Teufenthal, Aarau, Le Locle, La Chaux de Fonds, etc.) are listed in alphabetical order.

Chapter 7: Musical box terms and mechanical devices. Technical and other terms are described and listed in alphabetical order.

Chapter 8: Makers & agents trademarks & logos, craft marks, tools & materials. An alphabetical list of trade marks, stamps and logos plus a description of early tools and the history of comb steel.

Chapter 9: A study of long & short pin *Forte Piano* movements. A unique study of the *Forte Piano* single comb movements by Henri-Joseph and David Lecoultrie.

Chapter 10: Musical box types, styles of music & books of airs. A study of the musical styles created by d by different mechanical layouts and musical arrangements, plus an analysis of the books of *gammes* (tuning scales) and books of airs (*Livre d'airs*).

Chapter 11: People, places & dates. Maps and lists record names and addresses of makers and agents in alphabetical order both by both location and name.

**AMBC sale items**

The following items are for sale to AMBC members and those of its associated organisations. Surplus from sales will fund AMBC administration costs. The primary allocation will be towards research and further publication for the benefit of AMBC members and that of associated organisations.

Contact P. Bellamy or Ted Brown for P&P details: bellamypaul@btinternet.com or 01403823533.

**A Passion for Barrel Pianos** by Milly & Colin Williams. (See illustration)

This delightful and informative limited edition has over 60 illustrations and charts, most in colour. There are 12 sections dealing with aspects of casework, barrels, gearing, musical arrangement, marking and pinning.

The booklet is A4, ring-backed binding for easy use, with 40 pages of information between the covers.

UK price: £10 + P&P with comparable European and overseas costs to be negotiated.

**Cylinder Musical Box Design & Repair** by HAV Bulleid. This A5 234 page book, long out of print, is available brand new for the bargain price of £10 + P&P.

**Cylinder Musical Box Technology** by HAV Bulleid. This A5 290 page book, long out of print, is available brand new for the bargain price of £10 + P&P.

**\*Disc Musical Box Book** by K. McElhone. This exceptional A5 book comprises over 490 pages in full colour throughout. It is a compendium about all forms of disc and related instruments. Although second hand, it is in mint condition for the bargain price of £50 + P&P.

**\*The Nicole Factor in Mechanical Music** by Paul Bellamy and contributing authors Cunliffe and Ison. This A5 book comprises over 250 pages with colour centrefold of 16 pages illustrating 118 pictures plus ample charts and pictures in B&W. There are a few unused mint-condition copies purchased by the principle author for personal gifts but now donated to AMBC. A bargain price of £35 + P&P.

**\*Musical Box Tune Sheets** (The Tune Sheet Book) and three supplements, by HAV Bulleid. This A5 book and its supplements illustrate 400 tune sheets with dating charts for 15 makers. Contact E. Brown for details. They are in mint condition, purchased by Mr. Brown at the time he edited and compiled the book for Bulleid.

**\*The Organette Book** by K. McElhone. This 10 x 7-inch landscape edition has nearly 220 pages and hundreds of illustrations including a colour centrefold of 16 pages and 33 illustrations. Although second hand, it is in mint condition for the bargain price of £35 + P&P.

**\*Street musicians on Postcards** by Paul Bellamy. This 9 x 6½-inch book is in full colour throughout, comprising 108 pages. It is in the form of a 3-act play, each act in 4 scenes thus describing 12 categories of post card types. The intervals tell the history of postcards and the story of Christie's Old Organ. These are mint condition copies bought by the author originally for personal gifts but now donated to AMBC. A bargain price of £8 + P&P.



A Passion for Barrel Pianos



Milly & Colin Williams

*In future editions of Mechanical Music World we shall be pleased to accept advertisements from members, both display (contact Ted Brown for details) and classified (contact the Editors). Let us know if we can help.*