

MECHANICAL MUSIC WORLD



Edison 'Fireside' Phonograph

An Association of Musical Box Collectors Publication

From the Editors' Desk

What was the saying? Success breeds Success? Nothing Succeeds like Success?

The AMBC has published several titles since its inception and all have been very well received. The latest book, 'The Cylinder Musical Box, A Collector's and Restorer's Handbook', has certainly struck the right note and is now into its second printing.

We were delighted to hear of George Somerset's award, details of which appear on Page 26 of this magazine. Outreach to the general public is so important to the future of our hobby. We are always pleased to hear of your exploits and will feature forthcoming events or share stories of your experiences. Remember, this is your Society and your magazine, and you can contribute to it.

We were interested in the choice of player piano roll made by Paul Baker for the demonstration of roll playing during the last meeting. Cécile Louise Stephanie Chaminate rolls were not uncommon when we had them in England. What would have been uncommon would be to find a roll of her music that appeared to have been played more than once! They all seemed to be in mint condition. (I had better add that they continued in that state whilst in our ownership!) Members may recall that when Harrods sold a player piano the department sent round a member of staff to the home after delivery to demonstrate roll playing technique. Additionally of course there was, and still is, a special Practice Roll for owners which basically taught you how to pedal in time with the music (March, Waltz etc) as well as the use of the tempo control, subduing levers etc to achieve an artistic performance.

We thank Paul Baker for the really interesting, and well illustrated, article on toy gramophones and Juliet and Chris Fynes for the fascinating article on the rare Mikiphone.

David Soulsby has given us a wonderful overview of two Automata museums – as he so well puts it, both “very entertaining in different ways”.

The article from Paul Baker on the Edison 'Fireside' phonograph should no way be overlooked – it is a fascinating history of the cylinder phonograph and a bygone age of recorded sound.

Thank you again to all our contributors and we wish you all, readers and writers, a merry and wonderful Christmas time.



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Chairman's Report

The year has passed so quickly that I can hardly believe that our next Chanctonbury Ring meeting at the Old School will be the Christmas meeting.

We had our first auction in September and recruited some new members. You will read more about the auction in this journal, the major part of which concerned items from the late Terry France. The only unsold lots are two gramophones and a quantity of discs from 6 ins to 15½ ins of various makes. They include Symphonion, Polyphon and Kalliope discs. Give me a call if you need any.

Terry had an interest in gramophones and phonographs. Our meetings sometimes include them and our last one was no exception, as you will read in the meeting report on page 3. These machines also feature in other parts of this magazine and we hope you will find these articles informative and enjoyable.

The latest AMBC publication, The Cylinder Musical Box Collector's and Restorer's Handbook by Paul Bellamy, has been very well received. So much so that the first print run has now sold out. We are currently taking orders for another print run. If you would like to order a copy at £25 plus postage please contact Paul.

Visitors are always welcome to visit Kay and me to see our collection at the Old School. A few more instruments have been recently added. If you need further inducement, next door is a typical old English village pub that does good food!

You may be pleased to know that I plan to make another Christmas souvenir in time for this magazine, and I hope you will enjoy it as much as the previous efforts. We hope that you plan to attend the Christmas meeting, along with some of those who joined us at the auction. Come and enjoy our genuine old-time Magic Lantern Show and do bring a friend along to see it as well.

Please let me know if you would like to attend

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Publication Dates for "Mechanical Music World"

Winter issue 28th January; Spring issue 28th April; Summer issue 28th July; Autumn issue 28th October

We need articles and advertisements (unless repeats) to reach the Editors at least one month in advance of these dates. Please allow more time for involved articles with many illustrations.

AMBC Meeting Dates

Please contact the host to ensure a place is reserved and for needs to be catered for. Include any guests you may be thinking of bringing. Also please advise if a booking has to be cancelled so that places can be offered to others.

Chanctonbury Ring Meetings Diary

Saturday November 23rd Lunch supplied

All meetings take place at the Old School.

Please let Ted know if you intend to come.

the Christmas meeting so that we can plan accordingly.

Please also remember that the membership year ends in February and to pay your sub so that we can meet again in the New Year.

All of us on the committee wish you a very happy Christmas. Ted Brown, Chairman.

AMBC Meeting

August 18th at the Old School

Our meetings are loosely themed and members are encouraged to bring something along for display and discussion, so we all learn from each other. The themes on this occasion were gramophones and musical boxes, linked by automata.

At the June meeting we showed a small automaton picture of dancing cats fitted with a cylinder movement. The item was bought by one of the members for a complete restoration, including a fully repaired comb, which had 10 missing treble teeth. Members had another view of this instrument when it was compared with a similar automaton example driven from the disc of a small Symphonion disc musical box, Fig. 1. To the left is the cat automaton driven by a small key-wound cylinder movement. The movement drives a wooden disc with pins at right angle to its surface around the periphery. The pins are staggered at uneven intervals (see photo on P8 of Issue 17). The cat plays a violin and nods its head whilst three kittens dance to its tune with arms and legs a-swinging. Even for adults, it is an extremely amusing and rather rare item made for childish entertainment about 130 years ago. To its right is the disc musical box with its theatre-like atrium and dancing animals, this time a mother pig, a drum and her dancing piglets. The operating prin-



Fig 1: Dancing Cats and Pigs

ciple is the same, a rotating pinned disc. This time, the wooden disc is slightly larger with a rubber band around its circumference. The atrium tilts back to reveal a standard disc musical box and, when fitted with a disc and closed, the musical disc drives the wooden one. The movements of the characters, whether cats, pigs or sometimes other animals, are effected by a pivoted lever that is lifted and released by the pins. The lever is linked to other levers by means of threads and they in turn have threads that attach to arms, legs, heads and instruments - all very simple but quite effective. The disc movement is



Fig 2: Gramophone Boxers

slightly earlier than the cylinder version but it goes to show how both cylinder and disc movements were adapted to operate automata.

We then jumped ahead a few years to the time when the cylinder and disc musical boxes had been superseded by the gramophone. Even then the makers found similar ways to entertain, not just with automata but also with games. Fig. 2 shows a novel pair of boxers, perhaps not quite suitable for very young children. These two were battling away on an equally fascinating instrument called an Aeolian Vocalion Graduola.

The Aeolian company expanded into the gramophone market at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. A wonderfully illustrated book was produced, extolling the virtues of this rather unusual instrument, called a phonograph in the USA, introducing the product with the words: 'The phonograph that calls forth new beauties from your records'. The book's opening paragraphs were even more verbose: 'Out of a nursery rhyme that came whispering back from a crude, experimental machine into the ears of marvelling listeners, has grown the epic of development of a mighty world industry.' Yet more was to follow: 'It is the music of the artist in all its original glories of tone that lives again through the Aeolian Vocalion. The rich, vibrant tone-depths that give the noblest character to music, the subtle sound-tints that mirror quality, the exquisite *timbre* (sic) of each orchestral instrument, the bell-clear sweetness of the tenor voice, the deep-register sonority of the baritone - *all* the beauties of the record. The Aeolian Vocalion searches out and re-voices, undimmed, undistorted, surcharged with vital emotion.'

Despite employing such laudable terms, the reality was quite different. A cable extended from the front

of the case that formed an outer flexible tube within which was a flexible wire, called a Bowden cable, the same type as used for bicycle brakes. The master of the house could sit at a distance (42 inches actually) from the machine and demonstrate its effectiveness to the astonishment of his friends and family. By pulling out and then pushing back the knob attached to the end of the cable, all that was lauded above could be effected! Voices re-voiced, emotion surcharged, etc., etc., etc. In fact, it was a form of crude volume control that went from normal unrestricted sound from the horn to a muffled silent one. The gramophone had another interesting feature. The tone arm could be swung out beyond the limit of the record and then returned to the exit track to set the brake to the inner limit of the record.

The automaton, Fig 2, is mounted as shown, where the driven part of the device sits on the record. As the record rotates, a cam operates a pivoted shaft to set the boxing figures in an up-and-down motion; their pivoted arms and legs react realistically to show their foot work and pugilistic skills.

Another gramophone automaton was demonstrated

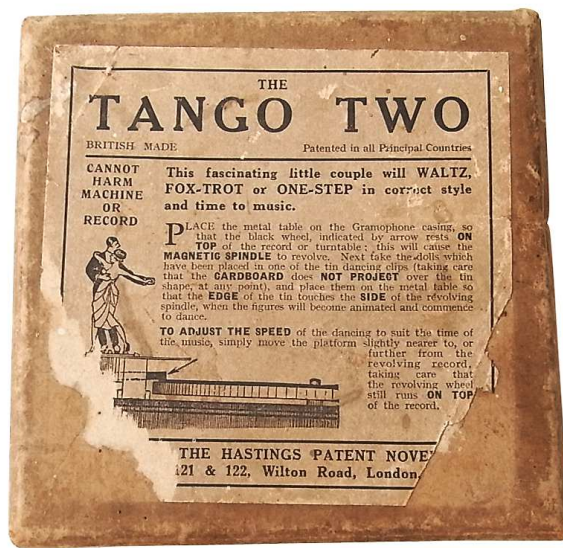


Fig 3: Box for the novelty dancers

called The Tango Two, Fig 3. It stated proudly: 'British Made, The Hastings Patent Novelty Company, 121 & 122, Wilton Road, London'. The fixed part of the device was placed at the periphery of the record with a floppy rubber disc, Fig. 4 that rested on the edge of the record. By moving the device towards or away from the record the speed of rotation would vary. When in contact with the record its constant peripheral speed acted as a variable speed drive depending of the degree of engagement with the rubber disc. The disc rotated a thin magnetised vertical spindle. Three specially shaped

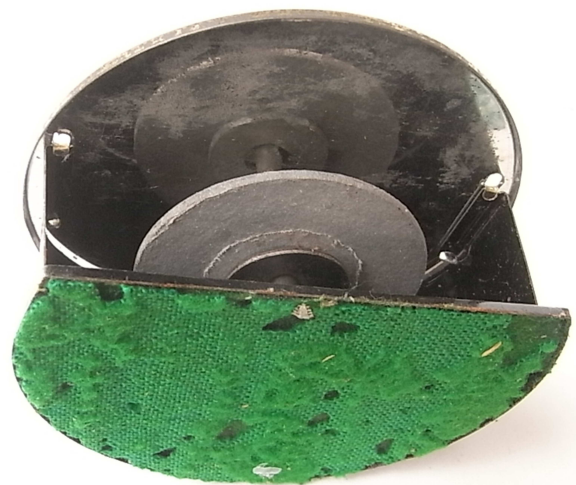


Fig 4: The rubber drive wheel of the Tango Two

metal discs gave three different dance options, a waltz, a foxtrot and a one step. Strangely, there was no mention of a tango! The waltz disc had three lobes. When placed adjacent to the magnetised spindle the edge of the lobed disc was driven in a series of eccentric circles. A small up-stand allowed the dancing couple to be inserted, Fig. 5. The intention was that the chosen record would be a waltz. The rubber disc would then be moved so that the gyrations of the dancing couple were synchronized to the beat of the waltz. The two other discs mentioned in Fig. 3 gave a realistic impression of the other two dances. Of the two forms of automata, the boxers and the dancers, the dancers were a knock out.

The Vocalion Graduola was not finished with its demonstrations; the talking books followed. These were a delight, comprising a record in a book full of coloured pictures demonstrating a fairy tale. The record was set in motion and a voice began to tell the story, page by illustrated page. As the storyteller



Fig 5: Dancing Couple

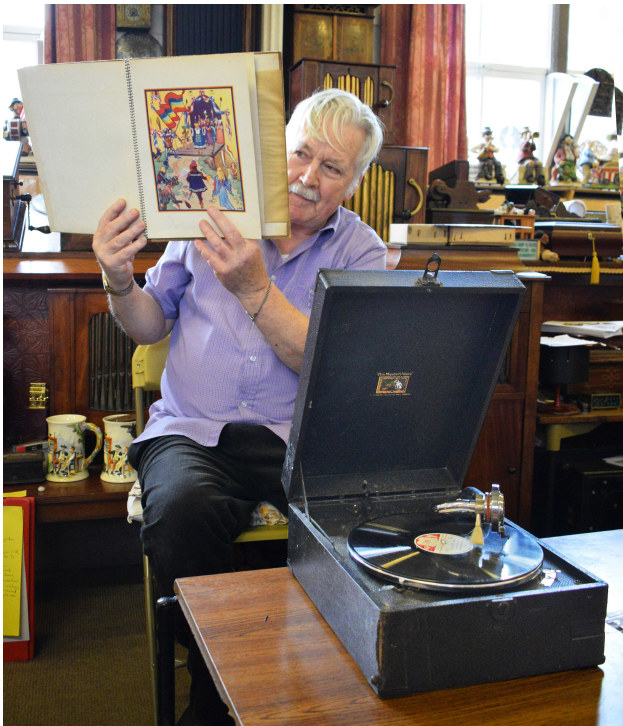


Fig 6: Ted Brown turning the page

progressed, the book was held up to the attentive children, aka the AMBC members, who paid silent attention. That is until it was time to turn the first page. In droll tones the voice announced; ‘turn the page’. There was sufficient brief silence for the story teller, aka Ted Brown, to turn to the next page upon which all the children began to laugh. Fig 6.

The story book emulated what went before in the days of the magic lantern slide shows where a series of slides were projected onto a screen, usually a white table cloth hung from a dado on the wall of the room, whilst the storyteller read from a prepared script.



Fig 7: Gramo Games disc

The last item played on the gramophone was totally different, Fig. 7. It comprised a colourful disc featuring horses, cars, dogs, airplanes, motorbikes, and speed boats. It was produced by the Dominion Press, London, and called Gramo Games. Some of the pictures had names such as ‘Streak’, ‘Bob’, ‘Balfour’ and ‘Tate’. There was one more ominous section to the disc headed ‘Hospital’. There was a variety of games to choose from, all based on a form of roulette wheel on the obverse of the disc, including roulette! So clearly designed for adults as well as children.



Fig 8A: 6-Air Nicole Frères

Having dealt with the theme of the meeting, a member brought two delightful Nicole Frères musical boxes for demonstration. One was a 6-air box, key-wind movement, serial 30161, circa 1852. Fig. 8A. Fig. 8B shows the case with quadruple boxwood stringing to the lid, fine rosewood veneers and elegant inlay. With over 100 teeth it had the ability to perform good arrangements of the musical works. The tune sheet, Fig. 8C lists tune 1 as a march from The Marriage of Figaro, tune 2 as Vedrai Carino from Mozart's opera Don Juan, tune 3 as O dolce contento from The Magic Flute and tune 5 Mon coeur suppire. It is quite rare to find four arrangements from Mozart, his works are not often featured on cylinder musical boxes,

The Marriage of Figaro is an *opera buffa* (comic opera) composed by Mozart in 1786 to words writ-



Fig 8B: Case of the Nicole



Fig 8C: The Tune Sheet

ten by Lorenzo Da Ponte. The story is quite charming, about a servant couple who fall in love. Their philandering master, Count Almaviva, also fancied her but not as a wife! The Count was denied his claims upon the young servant girl, Susanna, and the young couple were duly happily married.

The story of Don Juan, also known as Don Giovanni, goes back to about 1630, the story of a fictitious libertine. Variations on his fictional life range from seduction of women of all ages to gambling and murder, so hardly a very pleasant character. There were several musical compositions but Mozart's is the most popular, written in 1787. The title, Verdrai Caruno, translates as 'You will see, my dear' a hint as to how Don Juan's lecherous resolve was overturned.

O Dolce Contento was a romantic lyrical poem, depicting sweet contentment, from the opera Zauberflote (the Magic Flute) written by Mozart in 1791. Mon Couer Suppire is another romantic piece of a loving heart, in the form of a minuet from the Marriage of Figaro. The musical programme is intermixed with tune 4, a Strauss waltz, and tune 6, another waltz by the rather less well known composer Janner.



Fig 9A: Nicole Frères No. 24244

The second Nicole Frères 6-air musical box, serial 24244, circa 1846, was very similar. A key-wind, with over 100 teeth, as shown in Figs. 9A & 9B. The tune sheet was badly damaged but safely retained by being mounted on a card. The old ink was faded and almost indecipherable



Fig 9B: The case of Nicole 24244

The members were also entertained by a virtuoso performance by Paul Baker. He played several pieces to demonstrate how a pedal-operated piano with its manual controls for speed, bass and treble volume, plus the pressure delivered when varying pedal power, created the effects that were described but not achieved by the Vocalion Graduola, Fig. 10. He chose Air de Ballet, by Cécile Chaminade followed by Danza delle Ora (Dance of the hours) from Ponchielli's opera La Gioconda. The Air de Ballet was from a ballet scene in the opera. The roll was a four-handed piece, effectively a piano duet played on the single keyboard.



Fig 10: Paul Baker demonstrates Player Piano technique

Cécile Louise Stéphanie Chaminade (1857 - 1944) was a truly remarkable woman, little known today but one who deserves more recognition outside her native France, Fig.11. Despite the disapproval of her father she became a composer and pianist, honoured by her country in 1913 by being the only woman



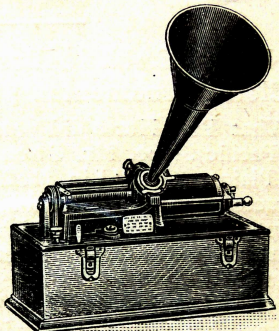
Fig 11: Mme Chaminade

composer to be awarded the Légion d'Honneur. She was mainly recognised for her concert tours, many of them in England but also in America. A noted professor at the Paris Conservatoire, Ambroise Thomas, also a composer, pianist and violinist, was quoted as saying: "This is not a woman who composes but a composer who was a woman."

Amilcare Ponchielli (1834 - 1886) was an Italian opera composer, known today mostly for his opera *La Gioconda*. Although the name equates in translation as *The Happy Woman*, *Gioconda* was not as happy as one would expect. The opera's story is one of passion, lust and revenge, ending in *Gioconda*'s suicide when she stabs herself to death. One would hardly expect this when part of the opera's music was parodied so many times. Walt Disney did so when he used this remarkable piece of music for his film *Fantasia*, with its comic caricature animals dancing wildly to the music. If that was not enough to bring the hardly unknown Ponchinelli to the world stage, it was given a further boost as a novelty song: 'Hello Muddah, Hello Fadda'. For those who have access to the internet, hear and see Allan Sherman's lugubrious 1963 rendition of 'Camp Granada' based on Ponchielli's work!

The customary tea and biscuits rounded off an entertaining and enlightening day.

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Toy Gramophones and Phonographs

The following is a summary taken from notes of a talk given by Paul Baker to members of AMBC



Fig 1: Bing Pigmyphone

Many different designs of toy and miniature gramophones were produced and marketed during the first decades of the 20th century, mostly by German manufacturers but also some other European countries.



Fig 1A: ThePigmyphone Mechanism

Fig. 1 is a Bing Pigmyphone made in Bavaria. The transfer-printed tin plate case is 16 cms square, Fig 1 shows the gramophone assembled for playing and Fig. 1A shows the mechanism and the tubular support for the horn and sound-box assembly upon which it is able to rotate during play.

When the gramophone is packed away after use, the horn and sound-box fit inside the case alongside the motor, together with the winding key which is also placed loose inside. Note the protruding start/stop lever which protrudes through a slot in the side of the case. The internal end of the lever acts directly upon the motor's governor. Fig 1B shows the lever in more detail, its operating positions marked 0, 1 and 2; 0 being the brake position. Although crude, the operating lever is fairly effective in use, allowing the records to be played at their correct speed of 80 rpm (80 rpm was the standard record playing speed up until the late 1920s) but many a child must have had much amusement by playing a record either too slowly or too fast, producing either a growling noise from the horn, or a high-pitched tone sounding somewhat like Minnie Mouse in hysterics - fun for the children of long ago and a fond memory for one or two older members present.



Fig 1B: Showing the speed control lever

Fig 1C shows the gramophone when packed away. The lid shows the Bing trade-mark logo, the letter B sitting upside-down on the W. This particular model of gramophone produced by Bing must have been made in huge numbers as examples are not difficult to find today, the design being patented in several countries including Germany, USA and UK. The

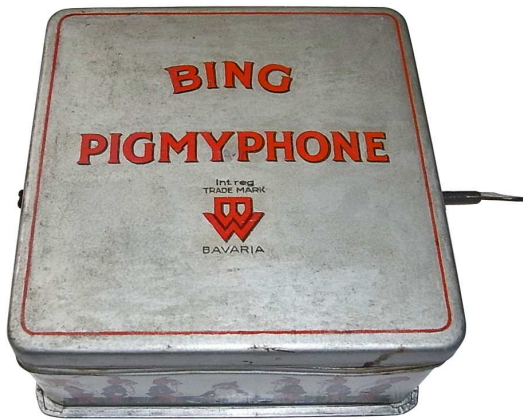


Fig 1C: The Bing packed up

marks DRP refer to the award of patent in Germany and the letters DRGM is the German equivalent of a registered design. Note also the transfer-printed decoration of gnomes, guitarists, banjoists and the Tyrolean girl feeding the Big Bad Wolf! (Fig. 1D). Next to be shown was another Bing toy gramophone, a "Kiddyphone" (Fig. 2). It is similar in its general construction to the first Bing gramophone shown, but the horn and sound-box and winding key do not pack away inside the case after use. At first glance there appears to be a difficulty in knowing how to wind the motor, but in this design, the winding-shaft is intriguingly placed vertically below the turntable which has to be rotated to the correct position to allow the winding-key to be engaged, a hole in the turntable thus allowing access. The circular body is divided by four columns, each division enclosing a theatrical-styled proscenium containing delightful images, as shown in Figs. 2, 2A and 2B.

Paul then demonstrated a third toy gramophone, branded "Nirona", manufactured by the German firm of Nier und Ehmer. Co-incidentally a second example was brought along by a member, (Fig. 3). These gramophones were robustly constructed and



Fig 1D: Pigmyphone decoration



Fig 2: Bing Kiddyphone

feature a well-designed sound amplifying chamber of distinctive shape, together with a sound-box with mica diaphragm of the general type found on full size domestic gramophones of the period. The sound chamber is embossed with the numerals "888" which is the model name. Fig 3 shows the winding crank and operating controls, a brake lever and speed adjusting screw. This model could be had in several colours, with or without transfer-printed decoration on the case sides. The delightful images are by the celebrated children's book illustrator Mabel Lucie Atwell whose distinctively drawn characters were also used on other manufactured domestic products of the period, including chinaware and calendar pictures. (Fig. 4). No doubt the familiarity of Mabel Lucie Atwell's images to adults and children alike would have enhanced the sales of this toy.



Figs 2A & 2B: Kiddyphone Decorations





Fig 3: Nirona

Paul continued his talk by demonstrating a cylinder phonograph, of a generic form known as a "Puck" phonograph (Figs. 5A and 5B). Its cast-iron base is in the shape of a lyre or harp. Although the name



Fig 4: Mabel Lucie Atwell



Fig 5: Paul with a Puck phonograph

"Puck" was first coined by a particular German manufacturer, the word soon came to be in general use as several rival European manufacturers jumped on the band-wagon so to speak and started to produce their own versions of the "Puck" almost identically designed. Unlike the phonographs produced by Edison and many others, the "Puck" was aimed at the very bottom of the market with its simple motor and basic construction. The small spring-motor powers the record mandrel by means of an endless cord, kept under slight tension by an idler pulley. Unlike more robustly built phonographs wherein the reproducer and horn are carried along the record by means of what is known as a feed-screw (an endless threaded rod that is connected by gearing to the motor-drive) the "Puck" has no feed-screw, the



Fig 5B: Another view of the Puck phonograph

record grooves themselves serving to provide tracking of the reproducer, which is fitted rigidly to the end of the horn which is supported by an upright pivoted rod mounted at the front of the machine. The phonograph has only three feet, one of which is adjustable in height, so that the machine can be set up so the mandrel "leans" slightly downhill, this being an aid to effective tracking and hopefully lessening the wear of the record groove! The stylus of the reproducer is made from hardened glass rather than industrial sapphire which was used in most better classes of phonograph reproducer. This significantly reduced production costs, but glass of course does not possess the wearing qualities of sapphire, so styli wore down fairly quickly.

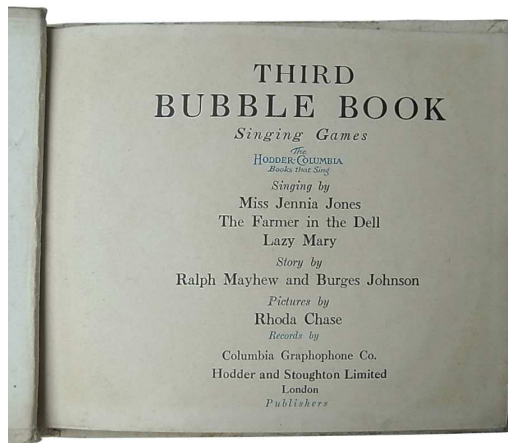


Fig 6A: a Bubble Book Children's Story

Phonograph cylinder and gramophone disc records

Paul talked about cylinder records and informed us that the term "wax record" is actually a misnomer as, although the very first cylinders of the late 1880s had contained various waxes in their composition, very soon afterwards a wax-like industrial soap compound was found to give much improved wearing qualities. The production method of recording cylinder records also changed over time. Earlier records were duplicated mechanically from a directly recorded master, which had a limited life, requiring a series of "working masters" to be made for long production runs of more popular selling titles. After the turn of the century, records were made by an injection moulding process whereby much greater numbers of finished records could be produced from a master recording. Records made by the moulded process were also made in celluloid by



Fig 6B: The Bubble Book record

some record companies.

The earlier duplicated type cylinders were usually brown in colour and the later moulded types usually black although celluloid records were made in an attractively bright colours by some companies. As the transition to moulded cylinders progressed, some wholesalers and larger retailers were left with considerable stocks of the now outdated brown wax records which were fast becoming almost unsaleable. To combat this and as an incentive to sales, especially by mail order houses, the cheapest models of phonograph such as the "Puck" were actually given away free - as long as the customer purchased a number of cylinders, usually a dozen, at normal retail prices. The purchaser could not specify titles but was assured from the advertisement the records sent with the phonograph would be selected popular vocal and instrumental items. What the advertisement did not mention was that the customer would receive not the latest up-to-date moulded records, but the outdated and almost worthless brown wax records!

Children's gramophone records also had some interesting facts in their marketing history. Figs. 6A and 6B are from one of a series of children's story books sold as "Bubble Books" produced by Hodder and Stoughton of London. In collaboration with Harper's, the well-known American publishers, and Columbia records, each book contained a series of stories and rhymes recorded on small single sided disc records of 5½ inch diameter. Another example of a "musical book" aimed at the children's record market is shown in Figs. 6C and 6D, the "Kiddie Record Album" published by British Kodisk Ltd. and slightly larger at 7 inches diameter, the reverse side of the records having wonderfully colourful illustrations depicting the song or nursery rhyme recorded thereon.

Paul also mentioned the double-sided "Little



Fig 6C: Kiddie Record Album disc

Marvel" records sold only by Woolworths and pressed for them by the Crystalate company in Kent. Production costs of the records was kept to a minimum as the records had to retail at sixpence or less, Woolworths proclaiming themselves at the time as the "Three-penny and Six-penny Stores". This was achieved by having only one copyright recording per record upon which a royalty was payable, usually a popular song or dance tune of the day, the other side of the record containing a popular instrumental piece or traditional song of which no copyright existed. A copyright stamp was affixed to one label whereas the other label showed a cartouche with a large letter W, for Woolworths.



Fig 6D: The Reverse of the Kiddie disc

Sound-boxes and Reproducers.

Paul made the distinction between the British and American terminology in common usage for the sound-producing part of the gramophone or phonograph. In general usage in the UK, the sound-box is found on a gramophone or disc playing machine, whereas the word reproducer is used when referring to cylinder phonographs. Across the Atlantic and also some other countries, the word sound-box is not really used at all. In American English, all "talking machines" are called phonographs, whether designed for playing cylinders or discs and the term "reproducer" is commonly applied to both types.

Both formats operate along similar principles by transferring modulations from the record groove via the stylus and diaphragm to a horn or sound chamber. With research and development over a period of many years, horn designs became quite sophisticated as it became apparent that the shape and indeed the exact flare of the horn is important in giving best results of quality of sound. Children's toy gramophones however rarely enjoyed this luxury of design and construction.

Paul then demonstrated a Woolworth's "Little Marvel" record firstly on a Bing toy gramophone and then the same record on a normal sized gramophone of the day, the difference in the resulting sound quality being quite amazing!

Finally, Paul mentioned some aspects of reproducer and sound-box design. Although mica was in common usage for diaphragms up until the late 1920s, it was prone to being easily damaged if mis-handled and tended not to reproduce bass tones that well. Although diaphragms of other materials had been made semi-experimentally since the earliest years of the industry, the 1930s saw most manufacturers using a lightweight diaphragm of pressed aluminium, cheaper to produce and giving better results across the tonal range, although general sound-box design had also progressed significantly by that time. All diaphragms are held in place and cushioned at their perimeter usually by a tubular rubber gasket, although other materials were also used. Rubber being a natural product deteriorates with age as the rubber hardens and thus becomes ineffective, so that gramophone sound-boxes and phonograph reproducers found today with their original gaskets will almost always require a rebuild to obtain optimum performance.

The Mikiophone by Juliet and Christopher Fynes

This is not a child's toy but is ingeniously constructed to play records up to 10 ins in diameter. According to the instruction pamphlet it is a mechanical masterpiece, the smallest phonograph in the world (Fig 1), which can be carried in the pocket "when walking or travelling so as to be able to organise an impromptu danse (sic) or entertainment". Furthermore it "can stand sea transport, the hottest climate and will never rust". Illustrations of the components and instructions for use can be seen on pages 14 and 15.

The "Mikiophone" was invented by the Vadász brothers from Geneva and patented in 1924. They contracted with the Paillard company from Ste-Croix to produce it and around 180,000 were manufactured between 1925 and 1927. A number of these instruments have survived, so it is not very rare. What is rare however, is the tiny needle box that was originally contained within. I was told by a specialist dealer in Rüdeshheim that these seldom come up for sale but when they do, they cost around 120 euros!

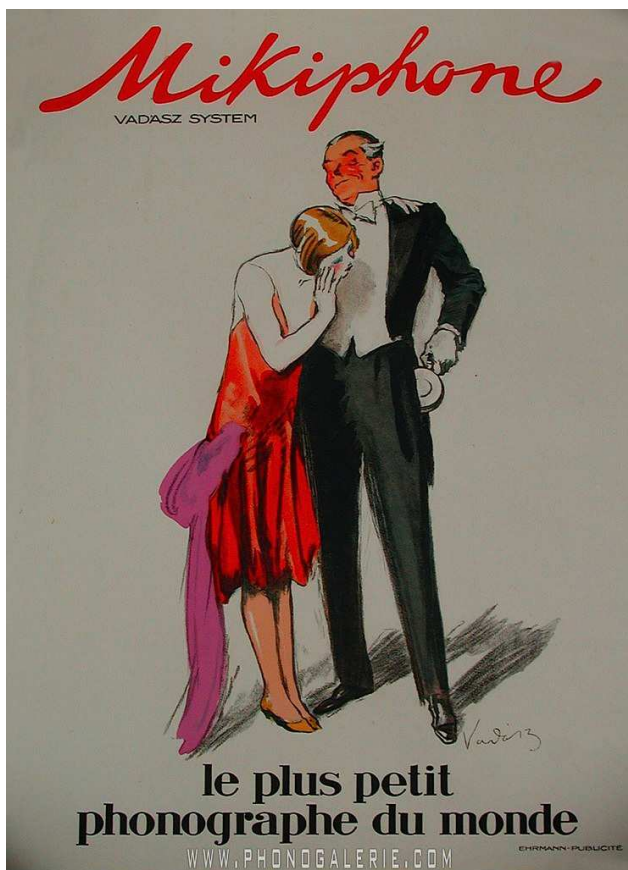


Fig 1: Mikiophone Advertisement

Its innovative design won it first prize in an international music exhibition in Geneva in 1929 and a place in the Zurich Design Museum. There was even a song written called "La Chanson du Mikiophone", sung by Mistinguett in a revue at the Moulin Rouge (Fig 2).

The so-called "Vadász System" was also used in the Odeon phonograph, a larger circular portable machine, made by the German Carl Lindstrom company around 1929. This was marketed in the USA under the Parlophone brand label.



Fig 2: "The Mikiophone Song"

The Mikiophone should not be confused with the Japanese Mikky-Phone launched in 1932. This was housed in a rectangular case about the size of a box camera. The early years of the 20th century saw the popularisation of photography and in the latter part of the 1920s and early 30s there was a vogue for the miniaturisation of phonographs/gramophones, made to look like cameras. There were a number of manufacturers of these shaped like box cameras. Other models were made to resemble the flatter rectangular folding Kodak camera. One of the most popular of these "camera phones" was the Thorens

Excelda made in 1929 with a crackle finish in a variety of colours. An exact replica, made in Russia, was demonstrated at the AMBC spring meeting.

These small portable gramophones were optimistically marketed as being pocket-sized and therefore suitable to provide entertainment on walks and picnics. The twin drawbacks of the necessity to also carry around a quantity of records, and the fiddliness

of preparing them for play, and even worse, packing them away afterwards, made them less than practical. Their novelty value must have surely worn off in favour of the much easier to use standard portable machines. Nowadays they have become collectors' items and, with fewer surviving examples, are much more expensive than their comparable big cousins.

AMBC AUCTION SEPTEMBER 2019



This fine Raffin Street Organ fetched £1800

Many of you will remember the late Terry France. His wish was that his old friend, Ted Brown should oversee the disposal of his mechanical music collection. It was decided that the fairest way to do this, on behalf of the family, and to allow everyone an equal chance of a purchase, would be to hold an AMBC auction.

We are fortunate to have ex-Christies and Bonhams specialist Laurence Fisher amongst our membership and he readily agreed to be auctioneer on the day. Additional consignments were accepted from AMBC members, attracted by the 0% sellers' commission. Buyers were only charged a modest 10%.

The fully illustrated catalogues were sent out far and wide. All were welcome to come and bid, conditional upon joining AMBC for the rest of the year. Saturday the 14th saw both established and new members walk through the doors of The Old School with their catalogues wearing excited faces.

There were bargains to be had, but with brisk bidding and numerous bids "on the book", from as far afield as Europe and America, some of the more popular lots achieved well in excess of the

estimates. Our star item, the Raffin Street Barrel Organ on its original cart, achieved £1800. One of the biggest surprises was the £550 paid for the Triola, against a top estimate of £140. An Edison red "GEM" phonograph almost doubled its top estimate to achieve £480. Another Edison phonograph, a Tanzbaar accordion and several lots of cylinder records all did particularly well.

By the end of the auction all the machines were sold* and happy buyers left carrying their purchases, leaving the sales team and members of Terry's family very pleased with the results.

To members reading this who didn't attend, you missed a super day of bidding, a social gathering with old and new friends, tea and cake, sounds of mechanical music and a true-analogue auction. So...where were you that day? To the crowd that did come, a very pleasing time was had by all and it was a respectfully fitting conclusion in finding new homes for the instruments of our late friend, Terry France.

* A number of original 11" and 12" Polyphon discs are still available. There are also Renaissance and Porter discs, some 8" Kalliope discs and a few smaller sizes.

For details please contact Ted on 01403 823533.



Through the Looking Glass and glimpses of Madness

A visit to the intriguing automaton museums in Normandy and Stratford-upon-Avon

By David Soulsby



Photo 1: Reproduction of a city street in L'Avenue Automatiques.

While the eyes of the world were on Normandy for the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings, I travelled to the south of the province to the city of Falaise and L'Avenue Automatiques. This is a museum that traces the history of the famous animated Parisian store window displays popular between 1920 and 1960. Having paid my 8€ entrance money I went inside to discover the streets of Paris from an early period faithfully re-created. Included are a number of shop windows from the large Department stores of the era, such as, Galeries Lafayette and Au Printemps, each with an animated scene from a former display. **Photos 1 and 2.**

However before taking a stroll around the atmospheric streets, I sat down to watch a video presenta-



Photo 2: Reconstruction of a fine gallery

tion explaining the history of the museum. It was created in 1994 to house the automata donated to the city by Cosette Decamps-Bellancourt, the great-granddaughter of Jean Roullet.

Roullet and Decamps, R&D, one of the most versatile and creative of all Parisian toy and automata makers were in business for more than 120 years. Their remarkable accomplishments began in 1866 with the creation of mechanical toys, musical automata, and finally, electrically operated animated displays for shop windows. Just as early automata had depicted the culture of the time of their creation, these displays illustrated popular customs and events from the early years of the 20th century. In 1909 the explorer Commander Peary reached the North Pole, and this milestone was celebrated by R&D for a tableau in the window of Bon Marché. This scene featuring automata as a display with icebergs and the aurora borealis, was the first Christmas showcase.

With the development of plate glass, shop windows of the major department stores had increased in size and the spectacle of the moving scenes was designed to attract and entertain visitors. Each year in early December the pavements were so crowded it was almost impossible to move past the major stores in Paris. Over the years the automata lost much of their originator's design genius and the figures depicted took on a more comical, simpler and less realistic persona. The displays that were chosen were often based on the styles of famous French cartoonists such as Raymond Peynet, Jean Eiffel and Albert Dubout. I must admit Peynet was the only one that I'd heard of, his characters *The Lovers* were famous appearing as jewellery, in porcelain ornaments, lithographs and even T-shirts over a number of years.

Moving on into the museum, I entered an area set up to resemble the original R&D workshops, where all the original automata in the museum were built. It demonstrates the whole process of sculpture, moulding, mechanics, decoration and costuming, with a number of completed automata in operation.

Photo 3



Photo 3: The Museum's Workshop in Miniature

The window displays are arranged around the museum in date order. An early representation shows one of the constructors actually beneath the shop window completing the Bon Marché scene, entitled *The City by the Lakeside*. **Photo 4.**



Photo 4: A "Worker" working on a display

One panorama created in 1936 for Les Magasins du Louvre was "apparently" based on an actual incident. This occurred when a drunkard moved the direction marker for the Tour de France and the cyclists crashed into a drove of pigs. **Photo 5.** Another amusing display, for Galeries Lafayette in 1947, shows the participants in a Dance Marathon, popular in America between the wars. The display mirroring a Dubout drawing comprises 19 figures in a tableau of spinning dancers, some collapsing on the floor in front of the judges as the jazz band plays on. **Photo 6.**

I found the museum interesting and an insight into how automata from the famous House of Decamps had expanded from toys into shop window displays in the early 20th century.



Photo 5: Calamity on the Tour de France



Photo 6: A Jazz Dance Marathon

In complete contrast, on my return to the UK, I travelled to the so-called MAD (Mechanical Art and Design) Museum in Stratford-upon-Avon. This was opened in 2012 by Richard Simmons and now exhibits around 70 pieces of kinetic art and automata from contemporary artists and engineers world wide. **Photo 7.**

The contrast between the two museums was striking, not only because of the different periods in which the automata were built, but also the themes that they depicted. The models here were made of simple materials, wood, iron, and even pieces scavenged from everyday items. They are handcrafted, generally hand cranked or with small electric motors, no electronics. The mechanism isn't hidden away but is generally on show so that you can see wheels, cogs and cams all interacting. These give you an extra interest in the automata. The exhibits in this museum display the hallmark of a large number of present day automata, a sense of the ridiculous.



Photo 7: MAD Museum

One of these, from Chris and Angela Margret, show three demons complete with paint pots and brushes swarming over and defacing a gallery portrait of Shakespeare. Simply entitled *Gremlins vandalise Shakespeare*. **Photo 8.**



Photo 8: Gremlins defacing Shakespeare

An automaton with a witty idea is from Neil Hardy entitled *Chicken or the Egg*. The description on the roof states:- In chicken coops throughout the land, the quest for the ultimate answer continues. Which came first the chicken or the egg? One of each is



Photo 9: The Chicken or the Egg?

placed on separate trolleys at the top of a wooden ramp. At the push of a button the scene comes to life. The ramp is raised and one of the chickens, designated as Chief Scientist, waves a sign saying - 'Release Hammer'. This falls down striking the two trolleys simultaneously and propelling the racers down the slope. The answer however appears inconclusive as the result is a dead heat. **Photo 9.**

Not all of the exhibits are in this vein of course. An



Photo 10: Halifax Tableau



Photo 11: Another Roland Emett design

unusual exhibit is *Halifax Tableau*, a piece commissioned by the Halifax Building Society, and is a moving representation of one of Roland Emett's cartoons. Emett is well known for his design and construction of fanciful machines with somewhat whimsical titles, such as the Humbug Major sweet maker on show at Beaulieu. He is most famous for the machines built for the 1968 film *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. **Photos 10,11**. There are also a number of kinetic art and rolling marble machines in the exhibition, but the automata by some of the modern artists were the highlights for me.

Both museums were very entertaining in different

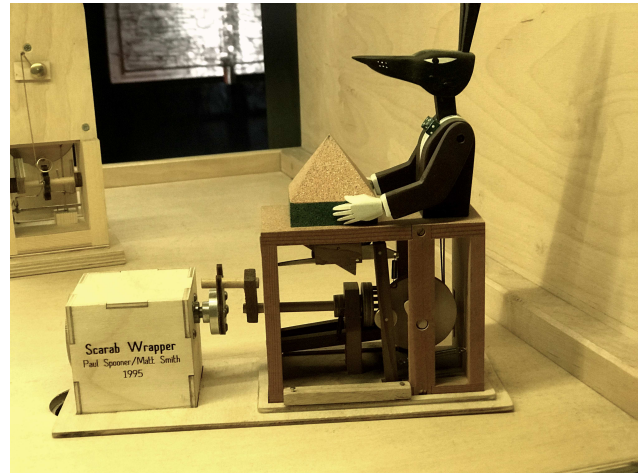


Photo 12: Paul Spooner Automaton

ways, the Normandy museum had several automata that made me smile but the MAD museum had many that made me laugh. A number of regular artists exhibit and also sell their work here.

Several of these are by Paul Spooner, **Photo 12**, part of the renowned Cabaret Mechanical Theatre, and the artist who built the fantastic *The Last Judgement* that graced their premises in Covent Garden, alas now closed. He currently has a small exhibition in London, entitled *A Day at the Architects*. It comprises a number of his automata and is located in the shop window of Rodici Davidson Architects. **Photo 13**. It seems that modern day automata still have the same pulling power to attract passers-by to shop windows as did the vintage ones displayed in the Normandy museum.

After all, as with most automata, what goes around comes around!



The Edison "Fireside" Phonograph

by Paul Baker

The front cover illustration for this issue shows a fine Edison "Fireside" phonograph, another similar example having sold in the recent AMBC auction.

Introduced into the Edison range in 1909, the "Fireside" was designated a combination type phonograph, indeed the first Edison phonograph model specifically intended for playing the industry standard cylinder record of just over four inches in length and two and a quarter inches diameter with a groove pitch of 100 t.p.i. (threads per inch) and having a playing time of just over two minutes, also the then newly introduced long-playing records of the same physical size but having a fine groove of 200 t.p.i. and thus giving a duration of around four minutes. The new records were branded the "Edison Amberol Record" whereas the older style of record would henceforth be known as the "Edison Standard Record" to differentiate between the two types.

Thomas Alva Edison, the great American inventor, dubbed the "Wizard of Menlo Park" had invented his phonograph or "speaking machine" as far back as 1877 but that first incarnation was a relatively crude affair when compared to later developments. That may well be true but nonetheless the world was amazed and astonished at a machine that could actually record and reproduce the human voice and indeed any other sound that was presented to it, being truly hailed as the greatest wonder of the age.

Those early machines are known as tinfoil phonographs and highly prized by collectors today. A sheet of tinfoil wrapped around a drum of wood or metal would receive indentations by means of an embossing stylus as the drum was rotated and at the same time caused to travel horizontally upon a threaded axle. The stylus was fixed to the centre of a diaphragm mounted across the narrow end of a mouth-piece. When the recording was completed, the stylus was adjusted back to the start position and upon turning a handle to once again rotate the drum, the machine would reproduce the indentations it had received upon the tinfoil, the original message being heard again, although in somewhat nasal tones!

There were of course limitations to this fairly basic device, most noticeably that the tinfoil would disintegrate after only two or three playings and even Edison himself later remarked that it took an expert to get anything intelligible out of the machine.

In the 1880s, the phonograph became neglected, having reached the limits of evolution in its current form and no major work was done on it after 1879 for the next eight years. Sales of machines had fallen off only a year after its invention and the phonograph's success as an exhibition piece having faded due to its limited practical possibilities in tinfoil form. Edison moved from Menlo Park to New York to supervise the installation of electric light there and did not until 1886 again take up his phonograph.

In May 1886, Chichester Bell and Charles Tainter of Alexander Graham Bell's laboratory were granted a patent for "Recording and Reproducing Speech and Other Sounds". Their device, which they ingeniously named 'Graphophone', a reversal of the two syllables of the word 'phonograph', was the first machine to abandon tinfoil as a recording medium, but using removable cardboard tubes that were coated with ozocerite, a wax-like substance derived from shale. Edison was annoyed that while in New York on electric light matters, the "Graphophone people had stolen his baby", and was determined to humble the interloper with something better of his own.

For the next year or so, Edison and his associates worked tirelessly on the project, not only on the phonograph itself, but also much time was given to the composition of the record cylinders, or "phonograms" as they were known in those early years. A famous photograph taken June 16th 1888 shows an exhausted Thomas Edison listening to his improved phonograph after 72 hours of continuous work on the mechanism and, although undoubtedly posed for press release purposes, the new machine shown is powered by an electric motor and now uses removable cylinders of solid wax that will not only withstand repeated playings, but also having the advantage of being able to be re-used many times by shaving off the recording to leave a blank surface ready to receive a new message. Edison's "Perfected phonograph", a vast improvement over the old tinfoil machines, was now ready to be demonstrated and promoted the world over, truly the latest and greatest invention of science.

The first successful machines to be marketed were powered by battery or mains electricity but by the mid-1890s, a phonograph with a reliable spring-motor had been developed, at first aptly designated the "Edison Spring-Motor Phonograph", later re-named the "Triumph".

Mechanical Music World

Over the next few years, research and development continued apace and familiar models of Edison phonographs started to emerge; the "Home" of 1896, the "Standard" of 1898 and baby of the range, the "Gem", in 1899 brought in to compete with other small phonographs then on the market, and at a retail price that was affordable to many, costing just \$10 (£2-2-0 in the U.K.).

The year 1902 saw the appearance of much improved records made by an injection moulding process which yielded far better results than the older style brown wax duplicated cylinders, particularly with regard to the volume and tonal range that could be reproduced.

In the United Kingdom during 1903, the London based Edison-Bell Company's controlling patents expired, which had placed a monopoly and stranglehold on the market since 1893. The floodgates were thus opened to competition and most folk who wanted a phonograph could now own one, with cheaper European imports from chiefly French and German manufacturers.

Records too had reduced in price from 5 shillings apiece in the '90s to just a shilling each by 1904 with much competition in the market place from several record brands.

The peak years of the phonograph were 1905 and 1906 during which the British Edison-Bell company alone in the run-up to Christmas, their busiest time of the year, were producing 20,000 cylinders per day in their London factory during the first week of December to keep up with demand.

The glory years of the phonograph were however short-lived as advances in disc record technology continued relentlessly during King Edward's reign. The great advantage of the disc was of course its durability and robust nature, being able to be handled reasonably freely unlike its fragile wax competitor; it also required less storage space; a recording could be pressed on both sides (by 1905) and, importantly to the consumer, playing time was far greater than the two-minute cylinder could afford, a 12 inch disc containing as much as ten minutes of recording. To combat the failing market position of his cylindrical records and indeed the phonographs to play them, the "Edison Amberol Record" was launched in September 1908. However, the innovation required an existing Edison phonograph owner to purchase a gearing-conversion kit as well as an additional new reproducer with a finer stylus to play the new records. Another issue was that many phonograph owners had purchased machines by other makers, which were not able to be converted.

The following year, the "Fireside" became available,

alongside other models in the Edison range which were now equipped with two and four minute gearing as standard.

Although the new "Amberol" achieved some initial success, the writing was on the wall for the cylinder trade, still relatively limited playing time compared to double-sided discs and the new composition material needed for the "Amberol" proved to be quite brittle and more easily damaged than its predecessor. Not until 1912 was Edison able to manufacture his records from unbreakable celluloid, now dubbed the "Edison Blue Amberol Record", but by then the Gramophone and its disc records had largely taken over the market, although "Blue Amberols" continued to be made as late as 1929 for the die-hards that preferred the format, together with a newly designed range of enclosed horn phonographs, the "Amberola".

To quote George Frow in his "A Guide to the Edison Cylinder Phonograph" published for collectors in the 1990s, "no greater tribute can be paid to the phonograph's inventor and his products than the number that have survived a century or more and can be fairly readily restored to playing well and giving pleasure".

It may be of interest to some readers to note that the example of the "Fireside" phonograph pictured on the cover has had a reproducer upgrade by a previous owner of long ago. It was sold new with an Edison combination type reproducer known as the Model "K", which featured two sapphire styli, either of which could be easily selected for the chosen type of record to be played (one stylus for 2-minute records and one stylus for 4-minute records).

There was a common opinion at the time among some phonograph owners and indeed some retailers, that the standard 32mm diaphragm of current Edison reproducer models did not give the best tonal results, particularly in the bass register, and to that end, a reproducer with an increased size of diaphragm was desirable. To answer these concerns, some new models of reproducer with a 42mm diaphragm became available during 1911, two of which were suitable for owners of existing phonographs that had only a small-eye carrier arm. The Model "R" and the Model "S" types of reproducer possess the larger diaphragm but the body is so constructed that it will fit into smaller size carrier arms of older phonographs. The Model "S" (shown in the cover photo) is similar to the Model "K", having the two styli but with the larger diameter diaphragm, whereas the Model "R" is intended for playing wax Amberols only, being fitted with a 4-minute sapphire stylus.



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TRADE MARK
Thomas A. Edison

AMBC Member in the News!

George Somerset, an AMBC member, featured in Herne Bay carnival in August as part of Whitstable Carnival Association's float.

Originally booked to appear at Whitstable Carnival itself, due to unforeseen circumstances the Carnival Committee were unable to get a car to pick him up on time.

The following week, however, he was definitely the star of the show, winning the Whitstable Publican's Prize for the best float, and charming the crowds both with the quality of the music, and with his stylish appearance.

Wearing a Henley Boater's Blazer and a straw boater, with a bow tie and a stripy shirt, he looked the very model of a Victorian gentleman.

Unfortunately, due to the high winds that day he was not able to keep the boater on for long.

He sat in a remade Surrey carriage advertising the Whitstable Carnival Association, next to Belinda Murray, the Whitstable Carnival Association chair, who was dressed as a pirate.

Belinda took care of George's rollers, feeding them to him as required, which were played on a Gem Roller Organ made by the Autophone Company of Ithaca, New York.

Music included Yellow Submarine by the Beatles, and Rock Around the Clock by Bill Hayley.

The music was amplified through a PA system in the car pulling the float, but was actually loud enough to be heard without, despite the blustering wind.

Many of the spectators commented on how original the float was.



Belinda Murray and George in the Surrey carriage. Note the microphone above the roller organ!

George plays his organette regularly outside Whitstable Library, from 11-2pm every Saturday, although he has been unable to recently due to illness.

The Whitstable Carnival Association's Treasurer, Chris Stone, said, "George is welcome to bring his music box to our carnival any time, and we hope to be able to feature him prominently next year."

Association of Musical Box Collectors

Aims and Objectives:

To promote the enjoyment of mechanical music in all its forms.

To provide opportunities of social interaction to members through meetings and outings of musical and other historical interest.

To establish formal links and working relationships with other national and international organisations in the field of mechanical music.

To encourage research and publication of articles and books on the subject.

To reach out to the public and foster a wider interest in mechanical music.

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*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.

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. £10 + P&P.

Cylinder Musical Box Technology by HAV Bulleid. £10 + P&P.

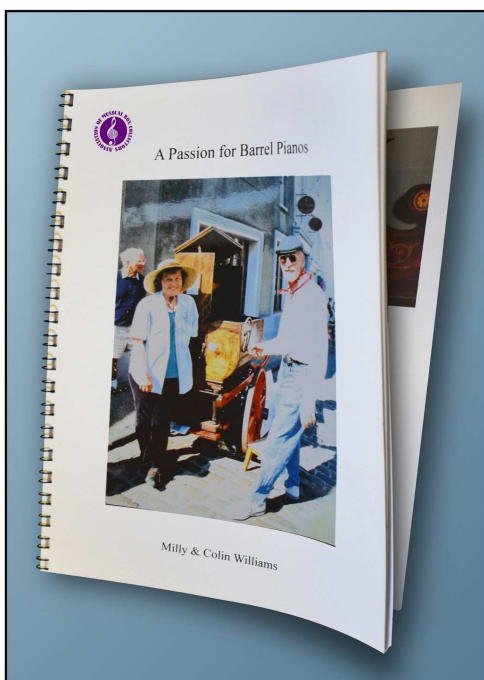
***Disc Musical Box Book** by K. McElhone. £50 + P&P.

***The Nicole Factor in Mechanical Music** by Paul Bellamy and contributing authors Cunliffe and Ison. £35 + P&P.

***Musical Box Tune Sheets** (The Tune Sheet Book) and three supplements, by HAV Bulleid.

***The Organette Book** by K. McElhone. £35 + P&P.

***Street musicians on Postcards** by Paul Bellamy. £8 + P&P.



Members' Sales & Wants

Polyphon 104 (19 5/8") Pediment:

I have some good reproduction pediments that can be supplied 'as is' in the white wood or stained and polished

Polyphon 105 (24 1/2") Motor Cover. Polished and glazed.

Symphonion 25 1/4" Pediment, in excellent condition.

Restoration Project: Case, Motor, Bedplate and Combs to make a Symphonion 25 1/4"

8-Air Nicole Freres Music Box with a Double Spring Motor.

Wanted: A pair of combs for a Polyphon 104 (19 5/8") or a complete bedplate.

Contact: Steve Greatrex 07774 418 706

I have spares for Reuge, Thorens, and Guisnez movements up to 31 notes. These include endlesses, combs, cylinders, stop/start levers, springs, spring barrels and even the knobs for the stop/start levers on mugs.

Call Ted Brown: on 01403 823533

A member who has relocated to Italy has some mechanical music box related items for sale.

For details call 00-39-523-891999 or mobile 00-39-3319234660

I am selling some of the items that appear in the little book "Collecting (affordable) Musical Novelties".

For complete list of items available contact Juliet Fynes on info@ambc.org.uk

If you have not yet bought a copy of the book it is £5 plus postage.

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advertisements from members,
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Editors). Let us know if we
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