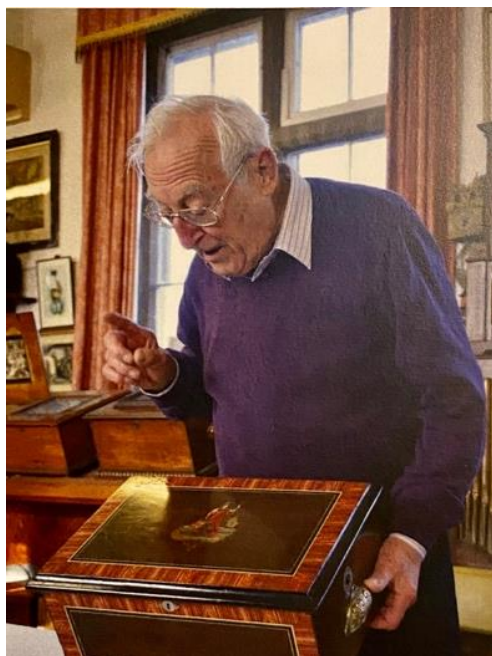


MMW Issue 12

AMBC Meeting 25th February 2018

Despite the cold weather there was a full attendance at the meeting. The themes of the day comprised the usual 'show tell' where members brought along an item of their choice, a review of BH Abrahams and a reflection upon African-American music between 1880 and 1910.

One member demonstrated a 6-air musical box which was presumed to be made by Conchon. The



casework was of extremely high quality, the slightly convex lid was veneered with rosewood with a beautiful floral inlay and triple boxwood stringing to lid and case front. The movement was in perfect order, complete with tune indicator and tune selector as well as the normal stop/start and tune change levers. The detached tune sheet was headed *Harpe Tremolo* and had the agent's name: D. Boer & Fils La Haye. La Haye means 'The Hague' and it seems to be the first record of this agent. The movement was a standard 13-inch cylinder, about 2 1/8 inches in diameter and had three combs. The dimensions are shown on the tune sheet in the bottom right cartouche as 24"-2.4". This is French code for lignes and pouce, dimensions slightly different to English inches. 24 lignes = 2.132 inches, the diameter of the cylinder. 12 lignes = 1.066 inches = 1 pouce. Thus the cylinder is 12.79 inches long. However, this could be a measure excluding the thickness of the end caps.

Bulleid described three possible interpretations of cylinder length in his book 'Cylinder Musical Box Design & Repair', page 95. The outer two combs were tuned to Sublime Harmonie, each with about the same number of teeth

The next main feature was a study of BH Abrahams the subject of a separate article in this issue by Ted Brown. Paul Bellamy demonstrated his 41-tooth comb, 9-inch disc movement. Although the boxes were cheaply made using printed paper to simulate wood surfaces and edge banding they still looked very good. The Britannia logo, beautifully produced in colour on a silver backing was the main feature of this BH Abrahams 'Britannia' musical box. It had a sturdy gramophone-type winding handle that needed to be wound forwards towards the body when facing the instrument

Barnet Henry Abrahams by Ted Brown

Barnet Henry Abrahams is a tricky chap to pin down. He was certainly British, having roots in Scotland and London. We know he died in 1902 but details of his life are not known with any certainty. There are suggestions that he moved to Switzerland in 1857 and dealt in musical boxes in St Croix and Geneva. A more credible source shows him emigrating to Switzerland in 1895. Whilst in England from 1866 he worked in Houndsditch with Newmark and Goldschmidt dealing in cylinder boxes. He certainly appears to have dealt with Ami Rivenc and Charles Cuendet. He also



sold a wide range of fancy goods, including silver. His silver marks were recorded at assay offices in London, Birmingham and Chester. Some marks have the letters B.H.A. in a rectangle or each letter within a circle (circa 1880). Later the letters were within an eight-point star, the same as his disc box trademark which also have "The Silver Star Depot" cast in their base plates. It is interesting to note that in 1895 he took over Cuendet, establishing the B.H. Abraham's Company in St.Croix

Abrahams produced music for the masses, fat cylinders that played two, three or four tunes per turn. Most were music hall and operetta tunes of the day (a bonus for people hunting for these, almost lost, tunes of yesteryear) with a few classical pieces and hymns. As yet I have never found Christmas carols on their tune lists. The cylinder box combs are usually fairly coarse to accommodate the large number of tunes but they are chunky, which gives the boxes (all of which have a large base area) plenty of volume. Untuned bells and zither attachment were included in many of the boxes. The disc boxes similarly use a large case and sound board and a strident comb. These are sometimes referred to as brash but they are loud enough to dance or sing to and I am

sure that this was Abrahams' intention. Remember, the phonograph, gramophone and player piano were only just around the corner. Abrahams himself entered the phonograph market.....

A Most Unusual Musical Mangle by Chris Fynes

Of all musical novelties this must be one of the most peculiar. It is a miniature reproduction of an actual mangle made by 'Nelson & Co' of London which is inscribed upon the arch above. As can be seen in the accompanying pictures. It is manufactured in the finest detail right down to the tiny working wheels underneath. The rollers rotate when the handle is turned and rise up and down to allow the clothes to pass between. The spring tensioner at the top is also adjustable. On the lower section is a box enclosed by a hinged flap on the front. There is a tiny handle that holds the flap closed, which when opened allows the flap to drop down exposing the musical movement inside. When first acquired the box was in need of a little restoration. The leaf spring at the top was missing so I cut out a brass shape to emulate one I found on a website. I very much suspect the original may have been made from sprung steel, but this I shall probably never know. Anyway, it looks more complete with a spring, notwithstanding that it is more cosmetic than practical. The obvious question is, was this originally made as a musical box, or was the movement added later? One can speculate, but in my opinion, it could well have been meant as a musical box. In support of this theory, the box and the flap are well constructed and of the same colour and patina as the rest of the mangle.....



HAV (Anthony) Bulleid and Cuendet by Paul Bellamy

In issue 11, Paul summarised the complexities of the Cuendet clan. The late HAV (Anthony) Bulleid only referred to the name Cuendet or his full name Jules Cuendet and not to other members of that family. All makers applied serial numbers sequentially. They were meant for the maker's records, not the person buying the musical box. Bulleid used serial numbers to create 15 dating charts. He noted common tune sheet errors when serial and gamme numbers (a tuning scale code) were sometimes reversed in error. He also noted that agents (sometime other makers) often wrote their own serial number in addition or in substitute. Thus a serial can be a maker's number, a gamme number in error (they are nearly always shorter than the adjacent serial) or an agent's number. His dating charts used points he called 'fixes'. They were determined from sources published in a manufacturer's sale catalogue, a bill of sale or something found written on a tune sheet. He sought the latest date that a tune had its premier, knowing that the movement was made after that date in order to predict a date line. When plotted on a graph the scatter of 'fixes' indicating a possible manufacturing trend. Only one or two firm fixes are required to predict a line past all the fixes. He anticipated a start-up rate of production followed by a uniform rate before tailing off to the date the production ceased. Changes in the life of the business by way of take-over or succession often caused one series to be terminated and replaced with a new one. Thus, some surviving movements can have the same serial number but at entirely different dates of manufacture.



Bulleid was cautious about using tune sheet patterns as a method of dating or ownership. However, patterns change with time and can indicate 'time zones' when coupled with other factors.....

The Harp that once... by David Evans

David considers that; the harp is probably the world's oldest musical instrument, having been around for many centuries. Over this time it has grown from a basic wood frame with gut strings stretched



across it to the magnificent modern concert harps of today, with key-shifting pedals, dampers etc. Many of the top orchestras include a harpist among their musicians. The very earliest instruments were small and portable. Being light and easy to carry, they could be taken on travels, to work or virtually anywhere a person could go. Playing of musical instruments by hand has been declining as a calling or occupation during the progress of the 20th Century, except, of course, for the ubiquitous electric guitar. Harps, as well as many other instruments, have been hanging mute on walls besides Tara's. In the first few decades of that century, all sorts of instruments were being invented and adapted to play themselves in various different ways, as we all know. About the only successful self-playing harp was that invented by J W Whitlock of Rising Sun, Indiana. He first patented it in September 1899 and it was marketed by the Wurlitzer Company from 1905 until 1910, during which 1500 coin-operated harps had been made and sold, many of them to speak-easy type establishments. Apart from a few modern attempts ranging from the weird to the impractical

(look on Youtube.com), no further self-playing harps have been produced, though some very good replicas of the Wurlitzer harp were constructed in the mid-20th Century. Another kind of self-playing harp appeared in the first decade of the 20th Century - one with a musical box movement built in. These were marketed by, amongst others, the Ward-Stilson Company of New London, Ohio, and after 1913, of Anderson, Indiana, and by the Henderson Ames Company of Kalamazoo, Michigan.....