

MECHANICAL MUSIC WORLD Issue 25 SUMMER 2021

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Chairman's Report

It's time to congratulate ourselves on reaching another milestone. This is issue 25 of our magazine. We thought initially that we could only be able to produce a brief newsletter for our small initial membership, but we have managed to do better than that. Our contributors continue to supply serious technical articles and lighter informative pieces over a wide range of topics; there is truly "something for everyone". Thanks to Chris Fynes for the design work, our advertisers for their support in helping to fund the printing costs and especially the editors, Lesley and David Evans for their hard work in pulling it all together. We are looking forward to producing the next 25 issues to inform and entertain our growing membership.

Long term members cannot fail to have noticed that the bulk of the magazine content is supplied by a handful of regular contributors who seem to have an endless source of inspiration, but we are delighted when someone new submits an article. So I make no apology for repeating the plea for others to come forward, even if it is only a letter commenting on an article, or just a short item, or brief details of a member's box that we can write up on their behalf.

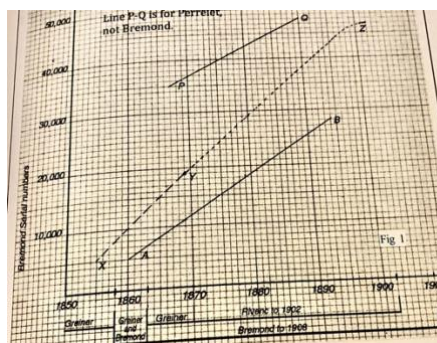
My little collection at the Old School is feeling a bit neglected as we have been closed to visitors for about eighteen months. I must admit to having the occasional glass of whisky in the schoolroom after paying a roll on the Steck or the Orchestrelle, but it not the same without an audience. On the plus side I have had the time to go through musical box discs and discovered many that I have long since forgotten. So these have now come to the top of the pile for extra playing. I regularly change the tunes on my disc boxes to give a more even wear on the teeth. As Paul Bellamy and I give our telephone number on the website we receive quite a few calls from non-members seeking help and information and all appreciate the personal touch rather than having to wait for an email response (we do get emails of course). Some even decide to join us.

How many cylinder musical box were made in total? By Paul Bellamy

Paul poses this seemingly impossible question and then carries on in the article presenting evidence to arrive at an answer. He makes an initial pre-estimate as follows "Based on the the 3rd Musical Box Tune Sheet supplement, Bulleid's dating charts cover the following makers: B. H. Abrahams, G. Baker-Troll, B. A. Brémond, F. Conchon, Ducommun Girod, L 'Épée, Métert & Langdorff, Lecoultres &

Perrelet, Mermod Frères, Mojon Manger, Nicole Frères, The Paillards, Rebicek, Ami Rivenc, Karrer. Of the few French makers, L'Épée was his only example.

Makers always applied serial numbers sequentially. When the date for a particular serial number is known, it 'fixes' the rate of production at that point. Two fixes spaced well apart means that the overall rate of production can be predicted. The more the number of fixes, the more accurate the date line, This is how Bulleid created his dating charts. By summing the estimated total production of these charts we get the first estimate. There were also many agents who applied their own



numbering system, often shown on tune sheets but they may have been using theirs for items other than musical boxes.”

Paul continues to draw on further evidence to provide a second, third and then a final tally. Readers will be amazed by the total that Paul arrives at.

An interesting Record Cover Edward Murray-Harvey discovers some local talent

Edwards’s article begins:-“A lot of the 78 r.p.m. records in my collection are still in original cardboard-covers dating from the early part of the 20th Century, and a number of the latter are printed (as a form of advertising) with the details of the shop which originally sold the records. I will tell you about one cover. I particularly noticed today dating from the late 1920s or early 1930s. It was originally



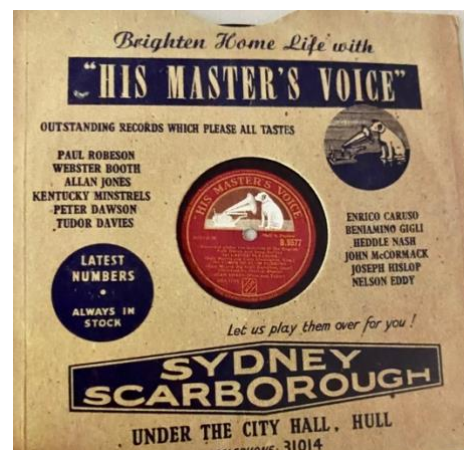
supplied by Frank Clarke (who seems to have been in business with somebody called H J Leech) and whose premises were in Castle Street, Thetford. This is a market-town in the South of Norfolk, and it was (and I suppose it still could be) so truly rural and so very far away from Norwich, that it offered items that you might otherwise have to go all the way to Norwich to acquire.

Thus, apart from departments dealing in (and I quote) Radio, Electrical Goods, Cycles, Baby Carriages, Sewing Machines, Sports Goods, Ironmongery, Tools, Oils and Colours, you might be surprised to know that there were also departments offering Guns and Ammunition, presumably to cater for sportsmen, gamekeepers, and

dare I say, poachers? A poster showing HMV radio and radiograms sold by Frank Clarke's business, by then run by Horace Leech, was placed on 6th December 1934, ready for the Christmas trade.

It is a few years since I last visited Thetford, and cannot remember if Frank Clarke's shop is still going in Castle Street (it burned down in the early 1970s — Ed). But one other noteworthy fact I found printed on that record-cover (and on the advertising poster) is, that in those days the shop’s telephone number was Thetford 7.”

He continues with further details of record covers including one from Sydney Scarborough of Hull. An interesting and well illustrated article.



Some Early Pieces from the Paul Tucker Collection

When we look back at mechanical music during the 19th century, it tends to be the period in which it was most abundant that gains most of the attention. This is understandable of course, as much of what is available today is from the latter part of the century where mass production was the order of the day. It has to be said though that some of the most interesting and well-crafted pieces were born in the very early years of the 19th century. Around the time of Lord Nelson's immortal victor at

Trafalgar in 1805, this solid gold musical seal (picture 1), would have been keeping its new owner amused by tinkling out its little tune on a 9 toothed barrilett movement concealed within its precious case.

A decade later, as Wellington faced Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, this finely crafted musical snuff box would have graced the pocket of its new owner. The lid is decorated with a cartouche of lyre and acanthus leaves on an engine-turned background. There are several continental silver marks, as yet unidentified. Inside is a two air *sur plateau* movement consisting of a small brass disc, with steel pins embedded in both sides. The date 1815 is stamped on the spring. As the power from the spring is released by the governor via the gear train, the disc slowly rotates and the embedded pins pluck the tuned steel teeth that surround the disc, to produce a piece of beautifully arranged music. Ingeniously, the maker has enabled the disc to be shifted downwards by way of switching a control, which then allows the disc's pins on the reverse side to align with another set of tuned teeth on the opposite side of that play another delightful tune".....



Magical Little Manivelle Paul Bellamy finds some beautiful examples

Paul introduces his article:- "In our 1st edition of Mechanical Music World there was a brief article about Manivelles. It was entitled Part I but, with the best of intentions, Part 2 has so far not appeared. So, perhaps it is time to address again these much neglected hand-cranked musical novelties and toys. Part 1 referred to the late Angelo Rulli who quoted the Encyclopaedia of Automatic Musical Instruments by Q. David Bowers. In the chapter on Adler and Fortunal Music Boxes Bowers wrote: "A wide variety of instruments was produced during the late 1890s and early 20th century.

These included hand-cranked novelty or toy boxes, etc, etc."

Like all research, these are sometimes the first steps upon which others can build, as did Angelo. The idea of the manivelle

was to replace the spring motor with a handle ranked mechanism and this was used in the late 1890's for disc boxes in particular, as Bowers quoted. However, the idea had also been applied to cylinder-and-comb musical toys much earlier, and they were produced in their thousands. Unfortunately, the exact date of when they were made and by whom remains a mystery. The first maker of hand-cranked musical toys seems to be Auguste L'Épée (1798-1875). In 1839 he joined forces with Pierre-Henri Paur of Geneva and started production at Saint Suzanne in the



department of Doubs, France"...

This well illustrated article continues the history and is a fine insight into these unique 'toys'.



Getting your Automata "Fix" during Lockdown by David Soulsby

David's article reminds us of the restrictions that were imposed on us in the U.K. in the time of the Pandemic.



"Lock-down has made prisoners of us all in the last 12 months or more, so opportunities to travel and look at automata have been very limited. The following rather **random** items provided a well needed "fix" for me until hopefully things return to some form of normality."

This third Lock-down in England prematurely closed the "Cabaret Mechanical Marvels" exhibition of automata, in the St.Albans museum, about a week after David had bought a ticket to go and see it! However the curator Sarah Keeling arranged an on-line presentation from the Exhibition hall a few weeks later. He downloaded

the free Zoom application and subscribed to the talk. As well as describing the exhibits there, Sarah provided interesting background information on some of the more prominent automata creators.



around a coffin which opens and a skeleton figure in a tuxedo rises up. Several groups of undead revellers

His other activities described in the article include the purchase of a Lemax model made from poly resin. entitled "Graveyard Party" which included a large array of moving figures, all gliding through a superbly sculpted three-dimensional landscape. Four separate ghoulish ball room dancers, mounted on magnets on a moving turntable, twirl



perform the conga, moving in and out of a beautifully rendered mausoleum. Further creepy figures pop up behind tombstones at the front of the model at various intervals. The spectacle is illuminated by LEDs and is accompanied by demonic music. The other dalliance that kept him busy was the building of an automaton figure himself. He purchase a self-assembly kit from *Timberkits*, an innovative company based in Mid Wales since 1993 who sell mechanical model kits made from natural wood. (More details in MMW 28, Spring 2022).

Recording in the Early Days

Fred Gaisberg arrived in England as Emile Berliner's personal agent entrusted with the task of finding European artists to record. Hearing Caruso sing at La Scala in 1902 led Fred to offer the tenor £100 to record ten songs. Gramophone & Typewriter in London cabled Fred saying 'Fee exorbitant, forbid you to record'. Fred disobeyed and Caruso made £1M over 20 years and the Company £2M. These pictures are from Fred's book 'Music on Record', published in USA in 1943 and in UK in 1946. 'The Author' referred to is of course Fred himself.

