

# GRACE NOTES

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Read about the Raby Castle barrel organ and hear it play by visiting our website at <http://www.acpilmer.com/thomas-weeks-cabinet-at-raby-castle>

## THE RABY CASTLE BARREL ORGAN

The Royal Mechanical Exhibition operated by Thomas Weeks at 3, Tichborne Street, Piccadilly, London, was established in about 1797. The exhibition included a variety of fine automata, some including music, and was open for public viewing with an admission price of one shilling (5p). Amongst the attractions was a mechanical spider, birds of paradise, clocks and other wonders of the age. An adjacent shop made it possible for admirers to order and purchase items similar to those they had seen in the exhibition.

Upon the death of Weeks, the collection was dispersed by auction in 1834. One of the so-called Weeks Cabinets forms part of the collection on display at Raby Castle near Staindrop in County Durham. The silver fittings date the piece to around 1801 and are engraved with the Vane family crest: it has passed by descent from the Earls of Vane to the present Lord Barnard.

As can be seen from our photograph, the lower compartment contains a 19 note barrel organ which can be set in motion at will, or released automatically by the clock which is located at the very top of the

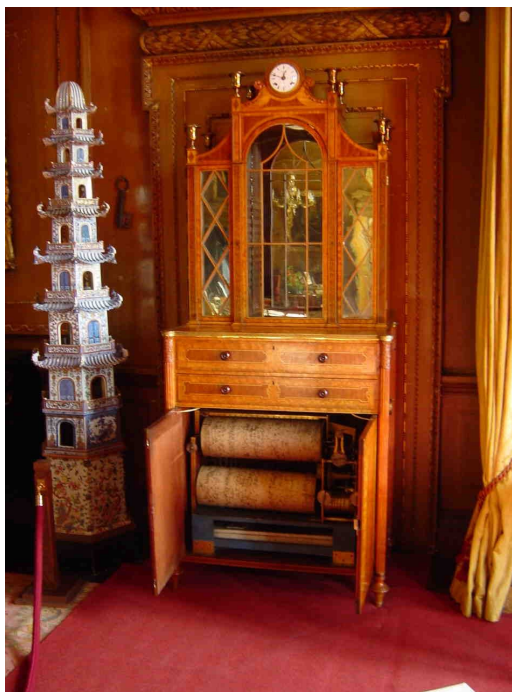
cabinet. When we were commissioned to restore the organ, it had not been playable since at least the 1930s. The work necessitated repairing and re-leathering the bellows and wind chest. The four ranks of metal organ pipes

the barrel.

Many problems had to be overcome to restore the complex spring-driven clockwork driving motor and several damaged and missing components had to be

newly-made. Two pinned barrels are present, each containing twelve tunes.

Since restoration, the organ has played regularly for visitors to the castle; to ensure no problems arise, the instrument is checked over periodically before the start of the season. In the past few days, Russell Wattam has again visited the castle for this purpose to ensure that everything is as it should be with the organ and mechanism. Raby Castle is one of England's finest medieval castles. You can find out more about its long history and details of public opening times and events by visiting the website



also needed extensive repairs; two of the ranks form a 'forte' register activated automatically by

at

<http://www.rabycastle.com>

## RE-VISITED: DECAP FROM CANADA

In the last issue of *Grace Notes* we reported on a 68-key Gebrüders Decap organ which had just been discovered in the United States and shipped back to its original builders in Antwerp, Belgium. Since then, Mr. Dan Wilke, a mechanical music enthusiast and resident of Buffalo, New York, has kindly contacted us to say that in the 1970s the organ played in an outdoor beer garden at the Skylon Tower, a visitor attraction overlooking Niagara Falls, Canada. It was associated

with a Dutch-themed gift shop located on the ground floor of the tower, known as "The Wooden Shoe". Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to locate a photograph of it when working at the tower, but perhaps one will surface before too long. Once again we appeal to any of our readers who may know more about this organ.

Roger Mostmans of Gebr. Decap reports that he hopes to begin work on restoring the organ during the summer months.

More information about the tower can be found at <http://www.skylon.com/>

As well as *Grace Notes*, we are also pleased to be able to bring you the latest newsletter from **Uniflex Organ Control Systems** in the USA in which you can read about exciting new developments which will bring Uniflex into the classical as well as the theatre organ world.

## SMALLEST ROLL-PLAYING ORGAN?

Back in 1990, Benjamin Hurdle won a national competition to produce a working model made only of paper and cardboard. His entry was an ingenious Paper Organ Kit. His initial design was later professionally produced on sheets of quality card and paper in full colour by a Dutch printing firm.

The finished product is decorated with images of the famous Perlee Dutch street organ "The Arab".



The kit, which is presented in a large, slim cardboard box, contains everything required to make the organ. The builder only needs to

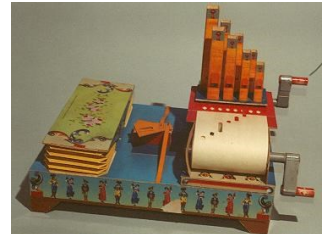
supply glue and a few simple tools. A length of perforated music roll is provided, which plays the tradition melody "Whisky in the Jar"; blank paper is included so the builder can also try their hand at cutting extra tunes for it.

For some time we have been sole distributors for this unique product, and have supplied more than 1500 kits to individuals and shops in this country and abroad.

With an intended skill level of 12 years of age and upwards, the Paper Organ Kit makes an interesting, educational and entertaining gift, and, on completion, it *actually plays!* One enterprising Dutch customer has even cut his own version of the Grand March from Aida for it!

As will be seen from the accompanying photo, the double bellows are located on the left-hand side of the kit; these are operated by the player and feed wind into the base of the organ, which acts as a reservoir. The music roll on

the right passes beneath the "pipes" when one of the handles is turned by the operator's other hand. Air passes through the holes in the music roll and creates a sound similar to whistling across the edge of a piece of



cardboard. The roll is rewound by turning the other handle.

The kits cost **£29.99** each including post & packing within the UK. (Prices for rest of the world on request).

We offer wholesale rates to museums and other retailers. (Minimum order 10 pieces). Enquire for further details.

## DON'T MISS "THE GOOD OLD DAYS"

Those who enjoy the popular music of the fair-organ's heyday in the UK have recently been treated to repeats of **The Good Old Days**, a BBC television variety show which sought to recreate the atmosphere of the Victorian and Edwardian music hall. The shows were filmed before live audiences in period costumes in the intimate surroundings of the famous City Varieties theatre in Leeds, and was a great success, running from 1953 to 1983. Around 2,000 performers were featured over

the years, always to the accompaniment of the 'indefatigable' authentic pit orchestra, mainly under the leadership of Bernard Herrmann (not the American one) who was also the leader of the BBC's Northern Dance Orchestra. Music by Ivan Caryll, Lionel Monkton, Gustave Kerker, Emmerich Kálmán, Franz Lehár and many others are mixed with all manner of popular songs of the period, performed by a plethora of singers and entertainers, many sadly no longer with us. It's possible to hear the lyrics to many

songs known to us from old music books, and to capture the spirit of the age in which they (and the organs that played them) come from. An added bonus is the occasional appearance of Penny Rigden, a professional member of the Players Theatre, who was also a pioneer in presenting dance routines in front of organs at rallies, and latterly with the Saunders family's show. Some episodes are available to watch again on the BBC4 iPlayer. They have been screened on BBC Four Television on Fridays at 8.00 pm.

## INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ORGAN BUILDING

Andrew Pilmer and Russell Wattam are both members of the Institute of British Organ Building (IBO), a professional association for those involved in making, restoring, rebuilding and maintaining pipe organs in the UK.

The Institute was established in 1995 to represent, inform, serve and assist organ builders and their suppliers, and to encourage the improvement of skills and standards within the profession.

The Institute aims to hold four meetings each year for its members. Different areas of the country are visited, and events are hosted by a local organ builder at a workshop or

church or concert hall. In 2003, A. C. Pilmer Automatic Music Ltd. hosted a summer meeting with a difference, when over 70 organ builders from all over the country visited our then workplace near York where a number of organs had been brought together for their inspection and entertainment. A buffet lunch was provided in a marquee, after which the instruments were explained and demonstrated. In this way, mechanical organs were brought into the spotlight and comparisons made between this branch and other types of organ building. Sometimes the differences are astonishing, yet others

show great similarity.

The Institute produces a high-quality annual review of organ building which features detailed descriptions of both new and restored or rebuilt organs. Volume 16 was published last December and contains 128 pages, many in full colour. Further details on the activities of the IBO, membership, free downloads, as well as a web store and much more can be found by visiting <http://www.ibo.co.uk>

You can read the report of the IBO's visit to us by downloading Newsletter No. 30 of July 2003, page 5 from the site.

## FEATURED ORGAN SCALE THE 92 KEY GEBROEDERS DECAP ORGAN

The 92 key scale was introduced by Gebroeders Decap in the late 1930s when it was first used in a number of café orchestrions with closed façades, a single central accordion, and percussion housed out of sight in a cabinet at one side of the main organ case. After the war, the more familiar Decap façade style with visible percussion came into favour, and several examples were built in the 1950s. Depending on the price, organs were furnished with one or two accordions and dummy saxophones, and were made to operate from a continuous music book.

This was also the time that Albert Decap was establishing his reputation as a music arranger and marker and he quickly evolved a style which brought out the best

in these instruments. A fully chromatic scale, the bass division has 12 notes, as does the accompaniment. The melody division has 22 notes with registers for jazz flute, vibratone, piston (trumpet-sometimes in wood, sometimes with zinc resona-

tors) and violin. The 16 note counter-melody has registers for céleste, vibratone, vibratone alto, saxophone and cello grave. Some instruments were further equipped with bassoon or krumhorn pipes. The cello grave register sometimes comprised metal pipes, sometimes wooden ones. There is the usual jazz tremulant for the vibratones and jazz flutes. The accordions, which in 92 key organs are variously by Scandalli, Frontalini and Crucianelli, depending on the age of the instrument, are connected to all of the playing notes. The instrumentation is completed by the usual Decap percussion set, which includes four temple blocks.

Together with changing light sequences on the façade, these organs make a great musical and visual impression, and there can be little doubt why they are so sought after today.



92 key Gebr. Decap organ "Marie Jeanne" in the Edgerton collection, USA. This organ was built in the early 1950s and is reputed to have been named after the original owner's daughter.

## IN BRIEF

An interesting 46-key Gavioli organ has recently been consigned to us for sale. We found this instrument in the United States in 2003 and brought it to the UK. On arrival it was overhauled and quickly sold to a collector who displayed it indoors in his hallway, but the time has now come for it to find a new home. It has never been seen in public in the UK and is in good playing condition; a couple of hundred metres of new books are included with it. The organ has been added to the For Sale page on our website where you can now view



more pictures of it. This is the only 46-key Gavioli organ we have ever had for sale, and, due to its relatively small size and standard scale, should be of interest to collectors or commercial users alike. The eight bass baritone pipes add character to the music. Other quality instruments available at this moment include a 52-key Bursens street organ built in the early 1970s and a small 46-key fair organ built by Andrew Whitehead & Co., which would be especially suitable for use with a small roundabout.

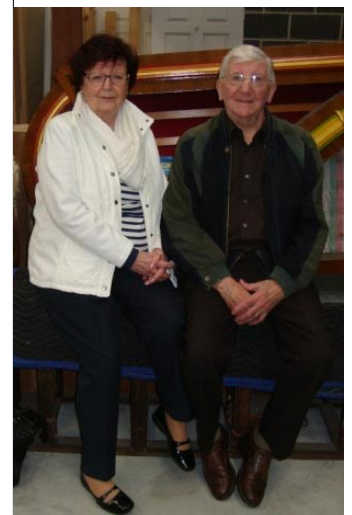


## VISIT OF ARTHUR AND PAULA PRINSEN

Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Prinsen, of Belgium, were recently in this country as guests of Adam Tyler-Moore of the Gavioli Organ Trust. The main reason for their visit was the presentation of the Arthur Mills Rosebowl, which is awarded annually by the Fair Organ Preservation Society to acknowledge outstanding contributions to either the society itself, or to fair organ preservation in general. We feel sure that our readers will agree that Arthur and Paula have well and truly earned this award by the hospitality shown to enthusiasts from the

UK in the past when visiting Belgium; for the hundreds of music books still enjoyed on organs all over the world, and for enabling many fine instruments to be imported. We also had the great pleasure of a visit from Arthur and Paula to our workshop, in the company of Adam Tyler-Moore. Arriving by train from London, they inspected, amongst other things, the 87-key Gavioli organ currently under restoration. Although not yet playing, decoration of the façade is already in an advanced state. Lunch was enjoyed at a nearby hotel, after which we all travelled

to the Astoria Centre, Barnsley, where Kevin Grunill awaited with the recently-installed Compton theatre organ. Arthur once owned a Compton which formed part of his famous organ collection at Sint Niklaas. He often played it for visitors and was delighted to hear the sounds of a cinema organ once again. This time in the capable hands of Kevin. Afterwards, Arthur was re-acquainted with the rare 110-key Marengi organ which he discovered in Brussels back in the 1970's; this organ is one of our future restoration projects.





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## CARL FREI 50TH ANNIVERSARY

**May 10th, 2017 will mark the 50th anniversary of the death of Carl Frei senior, a man who left a significant legacy to the world of mechanical organ building. Co-incidentally, on March 27th it was the 20th anniversary of the passing of his son, Carl Frei junior. We felt it both appropriate and fitting that these two greats of the organ world should both be briefly remembered here.**



The course of Carl Frei's life, which has been well-documented elsewhere, was changed several times by events that were completely beyond his control, namely two World Wars. His long career in the organ business first took him from Waldkirch to the cosmopolitan city of Paris, where he worked under the direct supervision of Ludovico Gavioli. Later he left France and moved to Antwerp, where he met and married his wife; it was also here in 1912 that their son, Carl junior, was born.

In 1920 Frei began a new business in Breda (Netherlands) and this quickly grew into a successful concern. Through his travels, Frei uniquely absorbed the influences of German and French organ building and combined them with the street and dance organ cultures of the Netherlands and Belgium. This varied background, together with his own innate musicality, led him to search for a new 'sound' which would be uniquely his. In an evolutionary process beginning in the late 1920s, he single-handedly succeeded in transforming the sound of the Dutch street organ, which triumphantly culminated in his magnificent 90-key instruments. His favourite, *De Lekkerkerker*, has now even the distinction of being a National Monument, protected by the Dutch Government. The combination of his own unique sound palette together with his unrivalled arrangements and compositions put him at the pinnacle of the organ business in the Netherlands.

Sadly, much less is known about the man himself. In the book *Fest im Takt*,\* Dutch aficionado Rein Schenk recalls meeting Carl Frei several times during the summer of 1966, and remembers how modestly he reacted when his work was praised. It also appears that Carl Frei was a man of habit (as recalled by his grand-daughter, Carla, in the same book), and from the titles and words of some of his compositions we can also see that he was a man who loved the simple pleasures of nature and the people around him. He was a friendly man, but of few words, according to those who met him; his thoughts were perhaps more easily expressed in music.

His compositions celebrated all manner of events, people and places that touched his life, demonstrating that he was a man of the world, who was aware of trends and current affairs. He must have been an ardent cinema-goer for he honoured in music several contemporary stars of the silver screen, including Asta Nielsen, Pola Negri, Hans Albers, Emil Jannings, Jackie Coogan and Henny Porten; he was also a follower of sport - the boxers Jack Dempsey and Max Schmeling both had marches dedicated to them, and there were also the *Gymnast's March* and *Long Live Sport*. His wartime experiences must have influenced him to commemorate significant events such as those of the *9th of November* (when Kaiser Wilhelm II was dethroned); the *Bells of Peace* which rang out after the end of World War One; the founding of the *League of Nations*; *Peace and Freedom*; and to remember his comrades with the *Artillerist's Song* and *Sea Hero's March*. He recalled places such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, Breda, Rimini and Varazze, which he visited on holiday, and dedicated marches to his best customers, such as Hommerson, Kunkels, Louis Holvoet, and Möhlmann-Warnies. A man whom he especially admired was also not forgotten: Ludovico Gavioli.

Carl Frei junior literally grew up in the factory in Breda, and became fully conversant with all of the tonal aims and methods of his father. As time went on, he became responsible for all of the actual construction in Breda, whilst Frei senior concentrated on arranging music for the organs. Again, events beyond their control forced the family to leave the Netherlands but it was safely re-united in Waldkirch at the end of the war in 1945; all his previous work had been lost. Father and son Frei showed great tenacity in making a new start in difficult circumstances, but the business flourished and they went on to build and restore many more organs.

A major achievement was the construction of completely new organs on the 89-key Gavioli scale, but Carl Frei's journey of musical evolution was not yet at an end, for a different marketplace demanded a different type of organ. Some German showmen desired a change of sound to the traditional one they had been accustomed to, and father and son Frei were happy to oblige. A completely new scale combined elements of the successful pre-war Dutch street organs with trumpets, glockenspiel and tubular bells to produce concert organs which found wide appreciation on the fairgrounds. One of the finest of this type of instrument (and the only one in the UK) was commissioned by George Cushing and we are lucky to be able to admire it today in the Thursford Collection. This instrument was completed only a few years before the death of Carl Frei senior, and it stands as a fitting testimony to the artistry and skill of Frei, father and son. After his father's death, Carl Frei junior continued the business and showed that his father's ideals still flourished in new instruments such as "*De Korsikaan*." Some more recent observers have sought to diminish the achievements of Carl Frei junior, but his skills as a pipe voicer and tuner cannot be denied. Whilst their work has been often imitated, very few, if any, have ever captured completely the spirit that father and son Frei imbued in their organs, and who between them spent well over 100 years in the business.

"*Long Live Organ Music*" is the title of a simple waltz tune written in 1959, to which Carl Frei added this lyric, loosely translated: "*When the organ is playing at the fair, everyone is happy. This was not just years ago, this is still so today. The drums beat, the organ plays in beautiful harmony. So come to the Fair; when the organ is playing, there's never been anything nicer.*" Think of this sentiment and the two men behind it next time you are listening to one of their organs.