A C Pilmer Automatic Music Ltd.

GRACE NOTES

Issue Ten

Winter 2020 – 21

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Special Note

Some readers may wonder why the Decap organ in the photo by Alan Ralphs (right) appears to be standing at a strange angle to the camera, but the Wurlitzer console next to it is not. This is due to the fact that the stage in the Tower Ballroom is 'raked' upwards and away from the audience, as in a theatre. This gives an improved view of the action taking place on the stage. The Tower Ballroom stage is still used for live performances.

For our readers abroad, ***Blackpool Tower*** *is an attraction at the seaside resort of Blackpool, which opened to the public in 1894. It was then the tallest structure in the British Empire. Inspired by the Eiffel Tower in Paris, it is 518 feet (158 metres) tall. Blackpool Tower is also the common name for the Tower Buildings, an entertainment complex in a red-brick three-storey block that comprises the tower, Tower Circus, the Tower Ballroom, and roof gardens, which was designated a Grade I Listed Building in 1973.*

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Merry Christmas and Best Wishes for a Happy New Year

This Christmas we go back in time to 1991 when we hired out this 105-key Gebr. Decap organ for use in the famous Tower Ballroom, Blackpool Tower, for the winter period. Soon after Alan Ralphs took this photo, the Wurlitzer organ was taken out of action for several weeks for work to be done to the console and the Decap organ provided music for dancing, alternating with the team of organists playing the resident electronic instrument.

It was a memorable early morning operation, bringing the organ in pieces up the main staircase from the promenade and building it up on the stage in the magnificent ballroom, next to what is without doubt the country's most famous theatre organ.

This Decap organ was presented by us at a number of locations including our stand at the Amusement Trades Exhibition held in Olympia, London, and spent a season at Smart's Amusement Park on the seafront at Worthing. It also appeared in the beer tent at Harewood House Traction Engine Rally and The Great Dorset Steam Fair as well as at Selby Fork Hotel in 1988, where it played for the entertainment of members of the Fair Organ Preservation Society at the annual dinner and dance. We believe that this was the first (and only?) occasion a modern dance organ has been used for its intended purpose in the UK, and was a great success.

The organ previously stood in the *Tavern America* road house in Lokeren, Belgium. Later, the Teugels Bros. added a flute 8 register to the counter-melody, the only such addition to a Decap organ of this type.

We have over 35 years' unrivalled experience in the UK with modern dance organs of various makes and types and are at your service for overhauls, repairs, tuning and new music books. Instruments are almost always available for sale.

Further Sales Innovation

As reported in our last issue, we have joined forces with Littleboy's Vintage Restorations for the sale of organs and associated items. You can visit the website at www.littleboys.co.uk

New video presentations of offerings will be available online early in the New Year. We hope you will appreciate the time and effort involved in producing these videos. Even if you are not a potential purchaser, please let us know what you think of them. As well as website links, a new YouTube channel, *Littleboy's Vintage Restorations* will also carry the videos.

A recent arrival for sale is a rare Gavioli trumpet fair organ (photo right). This 70-key barrel organ

dates from the 1880s and is perhaps the oldest extant example of this type of instrument. As well as the tunes pinned on its barrel, it can also play from custom 89-key cardboard music books; its rich sound is evocative of fairgrounds from before the turn of the last century, especially as old music hall songs form the basis of its repertory. It has only had one owner since 1960; this is the first time since then that it has been offered for sale. It has an impressive array of polished brass instruments on display (trumpets, trombones, clarinets and pan flutes), complemented by three fine-quality animated figures and percussion. This organ was completely restored and re-decorated from a very derelict, dismantled condition by us over a number of years. Such instruments are hard to find today; if you like the sound and appearance of this one, contact us for more details.

In Brief

Environmental

We have recently replaced all the lighting in our workshop and storage area with the latest energy-efficient LED fittings. This has resulted in an improvement to our working environment and an anticipated reduction in electricity consumption.

Milestone

As we prepare for 2021, we noted that we will be entering our sixth decade of continuous trading, embracing the 1970s, 80s, 90s, the 2000 noughties, teens and now 2020s. Some of the original makers did not exist for more than two decades, so we are proud to have reached this significant milestone. During this long period we have gained a wide experience of working on a large range of instruments and our clients can depend on more than 75 active years of experience. We pride ourselves on continuing to widen and develop our knowledge, experience and skills cross all aspects of the business.

Brexit

January 1st 2021 sees the United Kingdom leave the European Union. On December 24 agreement was reached for the future relationship between the UK and EU. There will be no change in transactions with the rest of the world, and due to a new free trade agreement, transactions with EU countries will not be subjected to any tariffs, as before. We will return to this subject in the next edition when more information is to hand.

72-key Decap Organ Progress

Since our last issue, work has steadily continued on this project. The **piano-accordion** forms an important and irreplaceable element of modern dance organs, both musically and visually. Mainly, only the best quality accordions were chosen, as the instruments are subjected to prolonged hard use in such organs. Before the war, Mortier used branded accordions with piano keys on both sides, which were made to the firm's special order. After the war, Gebr. Decap often used *Scandalli* or *Frontalini* instruments, both made in Castelfidardo, Ancona, Italy, as did Bursens and other makers. In this particular organ, an accordion by *Settimio Soprani* was selected. As part of the full restoration of this organ, the accordion has been cleaned, overhauled and tuned: years of playing in a smoky café atmosphere plays havoc with the reeds. The 72-key Gebr. Decap scale requires 49 playing notes on the accordion, controlled through a special intermediate relay with a pressure regulator. In the adaptation for automatic playing, the accordion pallets are opened by external motors, as seen in the accompanying detail photos. *Crucianelli* later became the favoured accordion supplier; in 1946 Scandalli merged with Frontalini and Settimio Soprani and later became FARFISA, a leading producer of musical instruments.

We hope you will find this feature of interest. As the project nears completion, our next edition will highlight further aspects of the work.

The completed accordion is now ready for fitting to the organ. The playing notes required are each connected by a flexible tube to the relay. The valves in the relay operate continuously but wind is supplied to the unit as instructed by the register box. By this means, the keys are only actuated when the accordion is required to play, and main wind is admitted to the accordion bellows through the accordion regulator. The visual impact of the keys and buttons being played by unseen hands remains an important feature.

This view shows the four banks of motors for each side of the accordion. Wind enters individual motors by means of a flexible tube and an angled nipple, which faces downwards to facilitate easy connection to the organ itself. When the 49 tubes are being fitted, care must be taken to allow the accordion to open and close freely as any impediment would mar the performance.

The rear of the restored accordion, seen from the treble (keyboard) side. The motors are mounted in four rows and connected to the keys by pull-wires. Furthest from the camera, the motors for the bass and accompaniment notes can be seen.

Featured Organ Scale

Why is an organ scale so important?

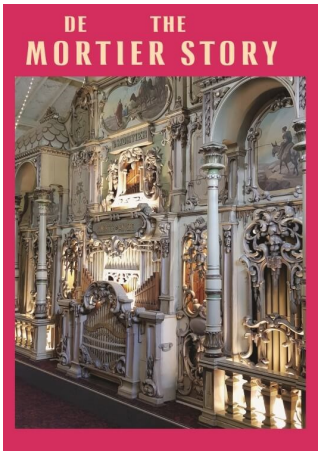
Continued from the last edition

In the last issue we considered how the concept of a separate counter-melody evolved from the trumpet division of the old barrel organs. It was not very long before reliable systems for automatically changing registers were introduced, and soon, the character of organs began to change significantly. These changes were especially prominent in organs intended for indoor use - what we would now term *dance organs*. If patrons were to spend their entire afternoon or evening in the presence of a mechanical organ, it was realized by the makers that more variety and expression in the music was essential. In these organs, the counter-melody became an essential part of the tonal structure of the organs. The melody violins were made more expressive by splitting up the multiple ranks which had previously sounded together (for outdoor use) to form violin *piano* and violin *forte* registers, usually comprising two ranks each. These more forceful sounding registers were alternated with solo voices, such as *flûte harmonique*, *carillon, vox humana* and *piston*, a finer, less aggressive form of trumpet. *Glockenspiels* gave way to *xylophones*, which gave a more pleasant sound indoors.

At this time, the main suppliers of organs to dance halls were Gavioli & Cie. and later Ch. Marenghi & Cie., with Belgium forming their largest market. Marenghi later overtook Gavioli in this field and in the years immediately before WW1 supplied some huge instruments of up to 112-keys with 24 automatic registers.

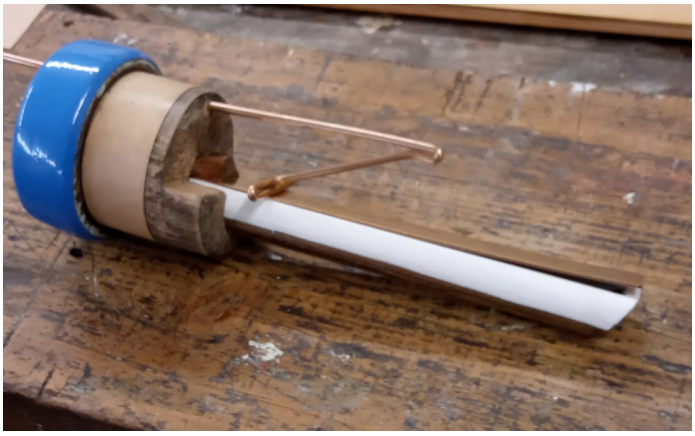
After the Great War, Antwerp became the centre of dance organ production. The major firm now was that of Mortier, which brought out many innovations to keep the organs popular and in step with the music of the time. New registers were introduced, such as the *baxophone*, and later, *jazz flute* and *vibratone*, the latter eventually becoming both a melody and counter-melody register. An accordion was also a desirable feature. With so many registers, a large Mortier organ could entertain the patrons of a dance hall for long periods without becoming monotonous or too intrusive. With the possibility of many register combinations and a fully chromatic scale, organs could successfully replace live musicians, offering obvious commercial advantages to the proprietors of halls. Next time, we will see how even this situation was further improved upon.

To be continued



You can read more about the development of Mortier organs in the informative new book "The Mortier Story". Since its publication, it has received much critical acclaim and makes a great gift. It can be ordered from our website. We hold the largest stock of this book outside of the Netherlands, and we ship worldwide. No enthusiast should be without a copy.

Further Pipework Repairs — Reeds



Following on from the pipe repairs shown in the last edition of *Grace Notes,* another detail of pipework seldom seen by anyone but the repairer or tuner is the shallot and tongue of a reed pipe.

Pictured here are the sound producing parts of a trombone pipe, which are amongst the largest found in a mechanical organ. The only element normally visible is the part of the wooden block, which here is painted blue. Out of sight, is a hole bored in its upper face which receives the foot of the resonator (the tapered wooden box or tube which amplifies the sound). The boring continues through the block and in its lower end is mounted the shallot, a hollow brass tube, capped at its extremity and with part of the wall milled away to give a slot along its length. Over this slot, and held in place by a wooden wedge, is the brass tongue which is the real sound producing part of a reed pipe. As can be seen in the upper photograph, the tongue is gently curved away from the shallot at its free end. The profile and extent of this curve is critical to the correct speech of the pipe. Resting on the tongue and projecting from the wooden block is the tuning wire or spring, the upper end of which projects above the block, and can be tapped up or down in order to shorten or lengthen the free length of the tongue, raising or lowering the pitch of the pipe.

The white area seen on the shallot is a covering of thin leather which covers the face and extends to both the inner and outer walls of the brass tube and cap. This takes away some of the harsher elements of the note, giving a rounder, fuller tone and is only necessary on the largest reed pipes.

The whole of this lower assembly is usually housed in a wooden or cardboard tube (boot) with a foot hole connecting it to the windchest. Once air is admitted to the boot, the tongue begins to oscillate, vibrating the air in the shallot and producing a frequency or note. This note is quite weak and uncontrolled in nature until the resonator is placed in position, refining and controlling the sound. This operating principle applies to all other reeds ranks, such as saxophones, clarinets, trumpets, and so on.

There are many variables in the production and repair of reed pipes, all of which have an almost infinite bearing on the sound. This could possibly have led to the German organ-building expression sometimes translated as 'Reedwork is fool's work'!

Russell Wattam

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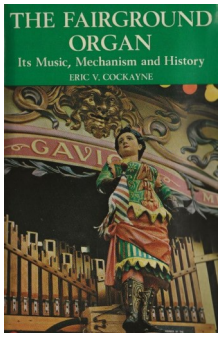
Eric Cockayne is seen here, relaxing with his wife and son at Verulamium Park where Charles Hart provided children's amusements and a display of organs during the summer. Photo courtesy of Stephen Cockayne.



The familiar cover of the first and second editions of Eric Cockayne's 'The Fairground Organ', which can be found on the bookshelves of most mechanical organ enthusiasts.

"THE FAIRGROUND ORGAN" – FIFTY YEARS ON

A tribute to Eric Victor Cockayne and his work — part 3

In this issue we look at how his magnum opus was completed

The run of 1000 copies of '*The Fair Organ - How it Works*' quickly sold out, and its great success further encouraged the idea of a second, more comprehensive book. Having made the acquaintance of Lyndesay G. Langwill, an Edinburgh accountant and co-author of *Church and Chamber Barrel Organs* (to which Eric Cockayne was one of the original subscribers), he [Eric] also came into contact with the well-known London-based author on mechanical music subjects, Arthur W. J. G. Ord-Hume. The latter was instrumental in introducing Eric to David St. John Thomas, founder of David & Charles (Publishers) Ltd., of Newton Abbot, Devon - the company that would later bring Eric's ambition for an expanded version of his first effort to reality.

A point discussed in some more recent publications is the difficult question of mechanical organ terminology. Historically, some organ components did not have specific names, so in the old days they were referred to by terms coined by those working in the various organ firms. Showmen also had their own terminology: a 'paper organ' was an instrument which used cardboard music books, for example. Later, enthusiasts coined terms for organ types (sometimes incorrectly) and, occasionally, continental expressions were adopted. Francis Buckley was keen that Eric's new book should utilise terms which were either historical ones, used in the past by the organ trade or showmen, or ones which accurately described the components in question. For example, he was keen to use the more accurate term 'piccolo' rather than 'flageolet' which some of the French builders had originally used; 'accompaniment' rather than 'vamps' as was occasionally used in published articles; and 'music marker' instead of 'music cutter' or worse still, 'composer', which was also often (mis-)used on the continent. By and large, the terms they finally chose are the definitive ones in common use today. Buckley was always keen to point out if any terms or expressions which Cockayne had chosen could have a second meaning, especially in church or cinema organ building parlance.

Francis Buckley generously offered to produce a barrel organ score for the new book and considerable effort was expended by the two men on its realisation. Even the choice of music was subject to much discussion, until finally, when matters of copyright had been taken into account, a waltz by Waldteufel was agreed on. That was not the end of the story, however, for although Francis Buckley could recall in great detail the intricacies of the musical arrangement, he was at a loss to remember the title of the piece in question. In one letter, Buckley suggests that Eric should contact the BBC, as in the past he had always found this organisation '*most helpful and obliging*' in such matters and wondered if Reginald Leopold, who presented the Sunday evening *Grand Hotel* light music concerts on Radio 2, might know its title, as this programme '*very frequently includes a Waldteufel waltz*'. Buckley was also a member of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society and eventually one of his friends in that organisation identified the title and thereby solved the mystery. The production of the score was accomplished after much effort and was clearly a significant undertaking; these days the task would be much easier to achieve with music writing software.

Another correspondent, Mr T. H. Clark of Truro, a member of The Gladiator Club, helped to secure special photographs of old music book covers that would later be re-touched and made suitable for printing. In this task he was aided by an anonymous friend, the manager of the local Kodak photographic works. Ronald Leach, an organ owner from Kent, offered to provide an appendix on the practicalities of mechanical organ restoration.

Help also came from the United States, from Harvey Roehl and his Vestal Press publishing house, and Dr. Miller in Connecticut, the then-owner of the 110-key Gavioli from Euclid Beach amusement park, who provided useful information on this organ's scale.

Eric Cockayne finally evaluated the information he had gathered and sent draft copies of chapters of his new book to Francis Buckley who corrected them where he felt necessary, and made comments based on his own knowledge. I was surprised, having read Francis Buckley's letters, to see how many of these suggestions found their way *verbatim* into the book; I am certain that the work was greatly enhanced by his involvement. For his part, it is clear that Buckley was pleased that in Eric Cockayne he had found someone who valued what he knew, and would preserve it in print. From reading his letters, I think that Buckley enjoyed the opportunity to revive memories of the old-time fairs, the organs, and the people in the trade, whom he held in high esteem and remembered with great fondness.

Francis Buckley was uniquely able to provide Eric Cockayne with reliable descriptions of the different types of pipes contained in organs, how they sounded and how they were used in the music. He wasn't always complimentary, stating, for example, that he thought the 104-key Marenghi organs had not been a great success, regarding only William Taylor's as being a good one. In another letter, he mentions that Peter Varetto had recently reminded him of the fact that, despite having altered the premises at Milton Street, Lower Broughton, Manchester, to suit their own purposes, the main door remained four inches too narrow to accept the case of a 104-key organ, from which Buckley concluded that this type of Marenghi organ must have had the deepest cases ever made, since the firm could easily accept 110-key Gavioli organs into the works.

That such little gems of information (and many others) were set down in letters by Buckley has ensured their preservation: surely, they would otherwise have been lost forever. Today it can only be lamented that opportunities for the early members of the F.O.P.S. to interview and photograph those who had been in the trade, as well as old showmen, were not taken advantage of. One wonders what other significant pieces of information have been lost in this way.

The revised book was entitled *The Fairground Organ – Its Music, Mechanism and History* and was published on October 29, 1970, priced at 63/- (£3.15). It met with immediate success. As vindication for its author's previous attempts to find information on fairground organs, the book quickly found its place on library shelves all over the country. Coming at exactly the right time, it also contributed to the great surge of interest in the subject; would-be organ owners and builders finally had answers to their questions.

A. C. Pilmer

This article has considerably exceeded the three editions originally intended, so rather than abridge it, we have decided to publish the concluding instalment in Grace Notes No. 11 which will appear in the Spring of 2021.