

GRACE NOTES

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>In Brief</i>	2
<i>72-key Decap progress</i>	2
<i>Why is a scale important?</i>	3
<i>Restoration — barrel</i>	3
<i>Eric V. Cockayne</i>	4



Since our last issue, a number of projects have been keeping us fully occupied; fortunately, we have continued working much as normal throughout the pandemic, maintaining, of course, current guidelines. With our attention focused on these projects, Issue Eleven of *Grace Notes* has inevitably been delayed. However, December is now upon us and we find Christmas and the beginning of another year fast approaching. News of some of our recent projects can be found in this issue, as well as the closing installment of the series on the life and work of author Eric V. Cockayne. Although 2021 seems to have passed quickly for us, the worldwide pandemic has once again affected the appearance of organs in public, whether at outdoor events, museums or society meetings. Hopefully the situation will improve over time and perhaps 2022 will see the return of many of the events we know our readers look forward to attending, such as the International Organ Festival in Waldkirch, Germany, scheduled for June. We hope that you will find something of interest within these pages, and if so, encourage you to let us know what it is that you enjoy reading about.

We would like to wish all our readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



Recently completed 72-key Gebr. Decap organ, now sold. See the panel at the foot of this page for further details.



86-key Mortier orchestrion (right) recently consigned to us for sale. Mounted in an unusual International Loadstar truck, it would be possible to sell either separately if required. If you have an interest in either the organ or the vehicle, get in contact with us soon.

YouTube We have recently established a YouTube channel under the title A C Pilmer Automatic Music Ltd. and from time to time will upload videos of instruments we have for sale and of completed projects. Please like and subscribe to the channel using the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYqsb30Fw8GVLNA3Cyd25SQ/featured>



And finally ...

Follow this link to hear a seasonal tune on the recently-restored 72-key Gebr. Decap organ, illustrated at the left.

<https://youtu.be/egG9PzTsyiQ>



"De Baron", a compact and fine-sounding street organ by Limonaire with a full history of playing on the streets. Trailer mounted, it has been fully overhauled and is ready to go.

<https://youtu.be/wzqR7CLiUfk>

<https://youtu.be/IGo8jYrcg>



73-key organ built by J. Verbeeck in 1990. An impressive instrument with many registers and large library of music books. In as good as new condition.

<https://youtu.be/1ZXmWdm2ExY>

<https://youtu.be/KwYmb39REzs>

OTHER INSTRUMENTS CURRENTLY FOR SALE

31-note Jäger & Brommer street organ made in Waldkirch, on cart with quantity of music rolls. Three registers, including trumpets.

20-note Trueman street organ with quantity of music books.

20-note Trueman street organ with accordi-on reeds, with quantity of music books.

31-note Stüber Berlin street organ with cart and quantity of music rolls. 3 manual registers.

Alan Pell novelty 'barrel organ' MIDI controlled pipe organ with beer bottle glockenspiel and beer pimp! Ideal for a publican or home bar!

31-note Alan Pell organ MIDI controlled with automatic registers for violin, bourdon and glockenspiel, plus bass drum and cymbal and snare drum. Complete with working bandmaster figure.

Alan Pell self-playing accordion. MIDI operated.

LATEST FOR SALE NEWS

Since teaming up with Littleboy's Vintage Restorations Ltd. for the sale of organs, the new concept has quickly borne fruit with several instruments passing to new homes. When consigned, instruments are brought to Littleboy's large warehouse and prepared for sale. Sometimes this has involved removal from trucks or trailers, thorough cleaning and careful inspection. Where necessary, repairs are carried out which vary from simple adjustments to re-leathering of

components and tuning. For safety, electrics are also often tested and brought up to present day standards. Only when each instrument is considered ready is it then offered for sale on the website. This means that a potential buyer can visit us, hear the organ playing well, and agree to purchase it on the day. We can usually arrange delivery very soon after, and we can assemble the organ in its new home to the full satisfaction of the owner. The new owner can rest assured that his

new purchase is in good condition and has the security of our back-up for future maintenance. Since our last edition, the 52-key Bursens, 70-key Gavioli and 101-key "De Arend" have all found new owners. We are currently fitting a new MIDI playing system in the latter organ, replacing the home-made unit presently in place. With our extensive joint reach on social media we have been successful in mining a different seam of purchasers.

IN BRIEF

Brexit

January 1st 2021 saw the UK finally leave the European Union. To simplify the sale of The Paper Organ Kit and the book *Waldkirch Street & Fairground Organs* to customers within the EU, we have appointed an agent, located in the Netherlands, who will deal with all orders and enquiries for these items. Visit <https://www.zeistbouwplaten.nl/> for further details on purchasing these items within the EU.

The Mortier Story, the new standard work on the history and products of the Mortier firm has continued to sell during the past year, so much so that we have secured a further consignment of copies. This book would make a perfect gift for any serious organ enthusiast. It is packed with information and photographs, many of which have not been published elsewhere. Details on this information-packed book and how to order it can be found on our website.

Environmental

Over the course of this year we have replaced all the lighting fixtures at our workshop with the latest LED units which has improved the general working environment and will reduce energy consumption.

2022 has several projects in store - we hope to be able to share some of them with you in forthcoming editions of *Grace Notes*.

BARREL RESTORATION

RUSSELL WATTAM

An interesting job earlier this year was the restoration of the barrel from an early Gavioli trumpet fairground organ. This organ had stood derelict for many years and water, having entered the case, appears to have run over the barrel's surface and collected on its underside, causing serious damage in the process.

The barrel (really a hollow wooden cylinder), with its thousands of iron and brass pins, was the means by which music was 'programmed' in mechanical organs before the introduction of perforated cardboard and paper rolls. The barrel slowly rotates while the pins and bridges lift the organ's keys, so the longer the pin or bridge, the longer a note plays. In order to keep the music up to date, barrels were regularly re-pinned with new tunes. In the case of

this this particular barrel, long exposure to water had caused many of the iron bridges to rust away, often leaving just a tiny corroded stump at the beginning and end of a note. Over time, others had been bent and distorted. As a result, the tunes were recognisable but suffered badly from both missing and stray notes.

Work was begun to remedy this and carefully, one by one, the damaged pins and bridges were removed and replaced by specially made brass wire formed into the appropriate length of bridge or pin. Most were made on an original pin making machine which we are fortunate to have in the workshop. Removing the rusted stumps posed special problems, often resulting in the holes in the barrel's surface becoming enlarged. These had to be plugged and the centres remarked for new pins. After a long, painstaking process, the organ now plays its barrel much as it did when last pinned in around 1922. There is no identification, but we think it is likely the work of Wright & Holmes Bros. of Manchester, although at an earlier date the organ had been through the hands of the Varetto family, also in Manchester.

Of the nine tunes, those we have identified so far are 'Peggy O'Neil', 'Julius', 'Jealous of You', 'I want some money', 'Stumbling' and a fine selection of Irish jigs.



FEATURED ORGAN SCALE

WHY IS AN ORGAN SCALE SO IMPORTANT?

Continued from the last edition

In the last edition, we left the story in the early 1930s, having focused on the large, fully chromatic Mortier organs with many automatic registers.

During this period, competition between dance organ renters became intense, and new innovations were quickly adopted. Mortier increased the number of keys in some organs to 112, by adding a separate single rank of 12 high pitched metal pipes (termed *flageolets*) which continued chromatically on from the top of the melody section (f # to f). The purpose of these pipes was to pick out the melody line, especially in dance tents where the canvas tilt absorbed a great deal of sound. The flageolets cut through this and 'carried the tune' in the same way that the piccolos had done before-

hand on French fair organs. The 112-key Mortier organ in the Thursford Collection is a fine example of this type of organ.

The Decap Brothers in Antwerp brought a sensational new development to the market in 1936 with the first of their 121-key organs. This scale followed modern dance organ thought with 12 chromatic notes each for the bass and accompaniment divisions. 25 notes were provided in the melody, an expansion of 2 more notes over Mortier's usual practice, and 20 notes for the counter-melody. The real innovation was the provision of yet another division, known as the "2nd counter-melody" which also had several automatic registers associated with it.

In a large orchestra or dance band, the various musicians are able to play in unison if desired, or different groups of instruments can play sepa-

rate parts of the music, giving it more texture and making it more interesting to the listener. This is known as *polyphony*. The more individual parts there are, woven into a complex whole, the more the music comes to life.

With the 121-key scale, arrangers could now achieve remarkable effects, whereby even single notes could be accentuated by adding a note on the glockenspiel on the second counter-melody, or full passages playfully embellished with glissandos, played on the flute.

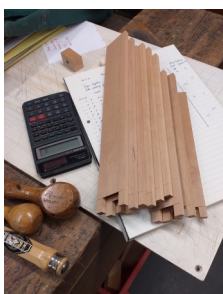
The new organs were very well received and provided stiff competition for the Mortier firm which lost many orders to Gebroeders Decap in the years up to the outbreak of the war. This success continued after 1945, and it is there that we will pick up the story next time.

To be continued

NEW PIPEWORK FOR DECAP ORGAN

Following on from the pipe repairs we described in the last edition of Grace Notes, this time, here are some details of new pipework for the Decap organ which was made in during the summer months.

Together with the *jazz flute*, a sound which most typifies a 'modern' Belgian dance organ is the *vibratone*. Basically a stopped (and sometimes an open) flute, the distinctive warm buzzing sound comes in part from a plate which vibrates against the body of the pipe when sounded. Another key feature is a small hole at the back of the pipe opposite the mouth. In operation, this hole is continuously opened and closed by a small pallet operated by the organ's jazz tremulant and causes the pitch of the pipe to waver.



The Gebrs. Decap organ in question already has a vibratone on the melody division and although the windchest was present for a counter melody rank, as a 66-key organ, the pipes were not. As part of the upgrade to 72-keys, it was decided to make the missing pipes new and so improve the overall sound of the organ.

By calculating dimensions from the existing pipes, a scale was arrived at and work commenced on making the new pipes. (Photo left)

What appears to be a simple wooden tube with a hole in the front is in reality a much more complex piece of work. Whilst the timber is first machined approximately to size, the final dimensions are achieved very much by hand. Each pipe has a different width, depth and length, with most other dimensions graduating through the rank. This often requires planing components to one tenth of a millimetre by hand.

The second photograph shows pipe fronts with their mouths cut out and ready to be glued in place as well as pipe bodies in the course of construction, some with fronts already glued in place.

After the main components are assembled, holes are drilled for the

features mentioned earlier and voicing can commence. Voicing



gives the pipe its sound quality and volume and consists of carefully cutting and filing the mouth components and wind supply until the whole rank sounds even and correctly.

Above can be seen the pallets and springs covering the small hole at the rear of the pipes as well as lead tubes linking them to the tremulant. Below are the 16 finished pipes with their vibrating plates screwed in place and ready to be fitted into the organ and tuned.

RW



You can to use this QR code to quickly access our website to see new content.



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You can hear the difference!



Eric Cockayne on the occasion of his 70th birthday in 1986.

“THE FAIRGROUND ORGAN” – FIFTY YEARS ON

A tribute to Eric Victor Cockayne and his work — part 4

The final chapters

In his book, *The Fairground Organ*, Eric Cockayne mentions that Peter Varetto had asked Francis Buckley if he could remember a certain march which the former had transcribed years ago from a piano roll for a 110-key Gavioli which Varetto Bros. was overhauling. This story is brought to life in the documents I was able to examine, which reveal that on September 11, 1968, Peter Varetto wrote to Francis Buckley:

“Many thanks for your letter enclosing the very painstaking and beautifully written score of “The New Army” march by Herbert for 110-key Gavioli organ.

“How ever have you managed to remember so correctly the original harmonies, countermelodies, piccolo variations etc., which I had long since forgotten....?”

“When I look at your score, I can almost see and hear it being played as in the days gone beyond recall...”

“When I asked you just to scribble a few bars of the march melody I didn’t intend it to be a full score. However, I say “thanks a million” for a most brilliant and accurate record and my appreciation of its dedication”.

Francis J. Buckley sent his congratulations to Eric Cockayne for a job well done, and continued to correspond for some time after the book was published. Throughout the entire period of their friendship, he addressed every letter to “Mr. Cockayne” and the latter’s replies were always addressed to “Mr. Buckley”, denoting their mutual respect.

The book immediately sold well, and in 1974 it was even reprinted. The second edition sold out after a few more years. Demand for the book remained high; indeed, for a certain time, second-hand copies were changing hands for up to £50.00. The information it contained was avidly consumed by its readers; some of it has found its way into other publications. My own copy was given as a gift after I had discovered the book in our local library. I remember being fascinated by the drawings, and in particular the one showing the self-changing mechanism for a barrel organ, and spending many hours trying to work out exactly how it worked. Having now read the original correspondence relating to this same drawing and description, I discovered that it took a long time to produce, for it had been many years since Francis Buckley had last seen such a mechanism, and I am inclined to believe that initially Eric Cockayne had actually never seen one in person, and worked only from photographs. That the two men eventually created such a definitive description is a great credit to them.

In October 1973 Eric retired as Superintendent of Regional Collection from the Thames Water Authority, as it had then become. He worked part-time as Theatre Manager at the Abbey Theatre in St. Albans and continued as a regular volunteer at the organ museum.

Given the continued popularity and demand for the original book, it was Eric Cockayne’s intention to write a revised version, but unfortunately, his health did not permit him to do this. His wife had already passed away in 1978; in late 1990 he became ill and took to his bed. At first he refused to go to hospital, but finally conceded. On November 25 he died in the ambulance before it could reach its destination. The funeral was held at Garston Crematorium.

Interestingly, Stephen Cockayne has since written that his father was not a musical man.

“Occasionally he might give utterance to brief snatches of a popular song. [...] He liked the “Grand March” from Verdi’s “Aida”, as well as one or two other marches, but around this point his musical expertise petered out. Although he had always been fascinated by the subject, he seemed much more comfortable dealing with safe, predictable mechanical things than with the treacherous quick sands of moods and feelings. I suppose that mechanical musical instruments offered him his only viable route into a world from which he found himself otherwise excluded”

On his death, the rights to the book were bequeathed to the St. Albans Musical Museum Society, which he had helped to establish after the death of Charles Hart. Eric’s two sons continue to hold the copyright. Peter Craig undertook to produce a revised copy, but it was wisely decided not to try to create a new, enlarged book, but rather to only put right a number of relatively minor errors which had come to light in the intervening years. A number of people contributed to these corrections and clarifications, after which the book was published in 2001 in the original format. For those who still do not have a copy, I can still thoroughly recommend this book as the best possible reference work about the fair organs used in this country. Until the museum can open again, it can be obtained by post from the museum’s website at <https://stalbansorgantheatre.org.uk/tickets-%26-shop>

Eric Cockayne was perhaps the first in this country as a serious researcher of fairground organs – others had collected photographs of organs but no-one seemed to be interested in the technical aspects. Although writers such as Father Greville have left us much detail on who the organs belonged to, and which fairs they attended, only very scanty and often inaccurate information is given about the actual specification.

It was a privilege to be able to study the cardboard boxes of old letters, notes and photographs, and in so doing, feel as if I have come to know a little more about Eric Cockayne and his friends and correspondents. In concluding this tribute, I wish to thank two officers of the St. Albans Musical Museum Society: **Peter Craig** (Trustee) for initially arranging the loan, and **Peter Allen** (Hon. Treasurer and Trustee) for putting me in touch with **Stephen Cockayne** (Eric’s elder son) whom I especially thank for providing me with biographical details of his father’s life, and allowing me to quote excerpts from his own unpublished memoir “My Father’s Puppets”.

A C Pilmer

Footnote: Francis Joseph Buckley (1894 - 1976) moved to Somerset after the death of his wife, where he lived until he passed away. It is a matter of some regret that neither his nor Eric Cockayne’s passing was officially recorded in *The Keyframe* magazine at the time, given the important legacy they both left behind.