

GRACE NOTES

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Christmas Greetings to all our readers and Best Wishes for a Happy, Healthy and Successful New Year 2026

We are pleased to return with a new edition of Grace Notes after a long absence. Welcome to those who have subscribed during the intervening period. Much has happened since our last issue, and we hope to share with you a few highlights of some of our activities in the following pages.

Once again, we have travelled widely, to carry out maintenance, consultancy, or installation work, on organs, including a number of trips to the USA and Europe, as well as here in the United Kingdom. We continue to maintain and tune organs on location; some restored by us in the past; and others we have come to know more recently.

Many projects have passed through the workshop, from straightforward re-leathering, to more complex and extensive repairs on pipework, keyframes, actions and so on. Once again, we find the supply of certain raw materials, hardware, wood screws, etc. to be problematic. The demise of Laukhuff, the major German organ parts supply firm, a few years ago, has caused many difficulties throughout the organ building world.

Government regulation and red tape came to the fore again recently, with the requirement for a licence to store and use industrial alcohol (methylated spirits), which is widely used in cleaning, wood finishing and music book manufacture.

There are a number of societies catering for the interest in mechanical music, though many currently experience difficulties in recruiting new committee members and officers. The benefits of membership are manifold and we wholeheartedly recommend supporting these organisations. We are members of the Musical Box Society International (MBSI); The Carousel Organ Association of America (COAA); the Fair Organ Preservation Society (FOPS); MechaMusica; the Fairground Society and Kring van Draaiorgelvrienden (KDV). All produce journals at differing intervals, with interesting content.

Finally, we would like to sincerely thank all our customers for their continued support, and look forward to meeting new ones in the coming year.

ACP

Contact us

by telephone:

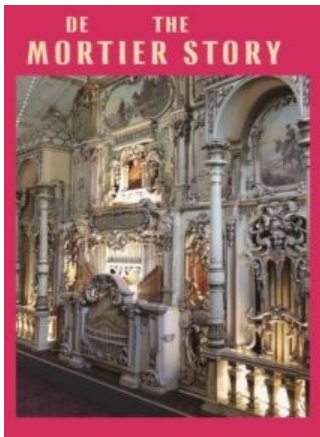
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NEW FAIRGROUND HOME FOR ORGAN



The Mortier Story is a book packed full of photographs and information about the Mortier firm and their products.

It was published a few years ago by the KDV in the Netherlands, but contains a full English text. The print run was relatively small, and is not likely to be repeated, so you should not miss out on obtaining a copy whilst they are still available.

We hold a limited stock for immediate despatch and guarantee that you'll not be able to put it down once you have it!

To order a copy, visit:

<https://www.acpilmer.com/the-mortier-story/>

(Purchasers outside the UK should first contact us by email for a shipping quote before making any payment.)



The picture above shows the **73-key J. Verbeeck** organ, which was offered for sale on our website. It was purchased by showman, Arthur J. North, for use in his set of three-abreast gallopers (formerly G. Irvin & Sons), now permanently located at [Beamish Open Air Museum](http://www.beamish.org.uk) near Stanley, Co. Durham. As the organ had previously been displayed in a truck, the height of the front had been kept deliberately low, so a new proscenium was made and decorated to match. When the museum is open, the organ plays continuously from about 11am to 5pm, seven days a week. Consequently, a new high-quality MIDI system has been installed, together with a large library of music files, featuring a wide variety of popular music. The files are read by one of our imported Brotech MIDI players, so that, other than starting and stopping, no other intervention is required by the ride's staff. The organ has many registers, allowing considerable variety, and provides a perfect ambience for the Victorian fairground and surrounding area.



During the past summer, we also overhauled a **20-note Hofbauer** hand-turned street organ, built in about 1984, which is used regularly by the Friends of Beamish to raise money for this group's support of the award-winning museum. Mounted on a cart, it is played by volunteers in and around the museum grounds, weather permitting, to entertain visitors and collect donations; it is one of the most successful means the Friends have to raise funds.



We have cared for this hard-working organ since about 1996, but after forty years, the bellows leather had eventually failed. The entire assembly was therefore carefully re-leathered, as can be seen in the two accompanying photos. Together with tuning, repairs to a few pipes and a good cleaning, we anticipate that the organ will continue to give good service for many more years to come. Further details at <https://www.beamish.org.uk/>



FEATURED ORGAN SCALE

WHY IS AN ORGAN SCALE SO IMPORTANT?

Continued from the last edition

The story after 1945

Many things changed during the war, and it would be easy to think that the development of mechanical organs had come to an end. In the UK and USA, some organs continued travelling with fairs and in amusement parks, but these were often already over 40 years old. This was also the case in Europe, but in Belgium and the Netherlands, there was still a vibrant dance organ culture. Organ renters had older instruments fitted with modern facades with exposed percussion, accordions, saxophones and trumpets, and there was great demand from smaller cafés for suitable new instruments.

Whilst the Mortier company continued building organs, it was not able to introduce many innovations, and after its closure in 1953, the field was left almost exclusively to the firm of Gebr. Decap.

The market for organs for village cafés was fulfilled, to some extent,

by Arthur Bursens with his *Arburol*-playing instruments. The disadvantage, to small establishments, of the cost of new book music was overcome by the use of relatively cheap paper rolls.

Another way of reducing physical size and build cost, was the introduction of so-called half-electronic organs by Gebr. Decap, initially of 92-keys. In these organs, the bass and accompaniment parts were still produced by real organ pipes, but the melody and counter-melody was created by a polyphonic electronic device, initially of the *Univox* or *Clavoline* brands.

These organs introduced other features which would later find their way into larger instruments. A novelty was the ability to accentuate the attack of the accordion using a special crescendo device. As the electronic devices came with a swell feature, this was also harnessed for automatic playing, and, properly used, is extremely effective. Combined with fully-chromatic scales, these organs were able to give convincing performances of the hits of the day, and were very popular with

the customers.

Electronics were also introduced at an early stage by Frans Decap in Herentals, who built organs on similar lines. René van den Bosch, who assumed the Mortier brand, also built instruments of this type. Sometimes, two electronic units were used: one on the melody; and the other on the counter-melody, bringing further variety to the music.

The arrangement of the books changed somewhat, to take advantage of the new possibilities available. Two names particularly associated with this type of early electronic organ were Albert Decap and Louis Somers, but others, including Marcel Bartier, also met the demand.

By the end of the 1950s, the large 'dancings' started to appear, often out of town and at the side of major roads. With capacities for several hundred guests, the early electronic organs were not powerful enough, heralding the next generation of instruments.

To be continued

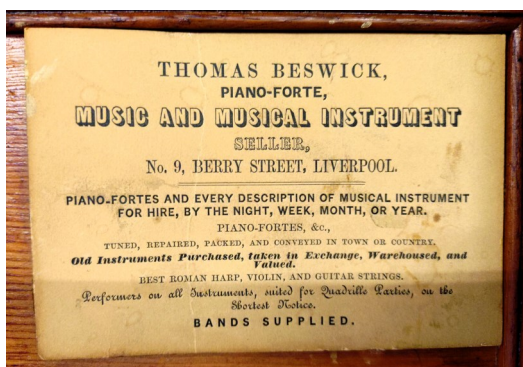
IN MEMORIAM

Once again, it is our sad task to report the recent passing of a number of old friends. We extend our condolences to their families.

HOWARD SNOWDEN was well-known for assisting with preservation tours abroad, as well as being a crew-member of *de Grote Gavioli*. He assisted us with office and administration work on a part-time basis for many years and was also a guide for the *York Museum of Mechanical Music*. His jovial personality and sense of humour will be greatly missed.

TONY HUNT owned the Burrell showman's engine, *Marshall Foch* and a 70-key Gavioli barrel organ, which we rebuilt. For many years Tony was President of the Leeds and District Traction Engine Club and was closely involved with the very successful rallies held at Harewood House, near Leeds.

TONY HENLEY came into the organ world relatively late in life. He attended rallies in the north, with his restored Wilhelm Bruder Söhne organ and, on one occasion, took it to the International Organ Festival in Waldkirch, the Black Forest town where it had been built.



The importance of paper artefacts:

It is not unusual to find signatures, labels and other documentation, which often give a clue to an instrument's past. Shown left, is a trade card glued to the soundboard of a Hicks-type barrel piano recently returned from the USA to the UK. Further research shows that Thomas Beswick set up in business in the 1840's in Liverpool and that his father-in-law was a shipping owner there. It remains purely conjecture, but perhaps the piano went to America new, possibly traded by the ship owners. Whatever the case, it forms a valuable part of the piano's history.

RW

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You *can* hear the difference!



Some of the finest orchestrions ever made were produced by Weber in Waldkirch, Germany. As you will read elsewhere, one of the largest Weber distributors in "the good old days" was the firm of **Gérard & Co.** of Brussels, Belgium. The connection between the two companies was a close one: Mr Gérard's daughter eventually became Mrs Otto Weber! The Gérard firm published a catalogue of the various instruments it could supply to cafes, bars and restaurants. Some years ago, we were lucky enough to be able to produce a facsimile copy of this 34 page catalogue, printed just like the original and measuring 21cms x 17cms. You can purchase a copy for just £7.00 including P & P [from our web-site](http://www.acpilmer.com). (UK only—Contact us for shipping prices outside the UK.)

PIANO ORCHESTRIONS COME TO UK



We were approached by a collector with an interest in acquiring a **Weber Unika**, a piano-based instrument with a rank of organ pipes, once popular in cafés and similar locations. Much sought after, because of their musical abilities and realistically toned violin pipes, they are enhanced by the wonderful arrangements of Gustav Bruder. We succeeded in locating one in excellent playing condition, and the necessary arrangements were made for it to be brought to the UK. The instrument was originally supplied to a location in Belgium, through Weber's agent in Brussels, G. J. Gérard. This is the second Weber Unika which we have supplied to a customer in the UK.

The quality of the music produced by the Unika caused its new owner to investigate other instruments in the Weber range, which eventually lead to us to locate, and obtain, a **Weber Grandezza**. Like the Unika, it is based on an upright piano, but instead of featuring solo organ pipes, the Grandezza features a re-iterating xylophone with expression. Once again the music of Gustav Bruder comes to the fore. We were pleased to arrange the delivery and installation of this second instrument, making a welcome addition to the Unika.



Above left: Weber Unika piano orchestrion.

Left: Weber Grandezza piano orchestrion.

The xylophone is located behind the horizontal glass panel in the upper part of the case.

Above: Manufacturer's and agent's inlaid nameplates on the underside of the keyboard lid.

GAVIOLI TROMBONES

Work continues on the 89-key Gavioli organ from Messrs. Screenshot Brothers Ltd.'s 3-abreast steam galloper ride, which was regrettably involved in a serious motorway accident. Being amongst the largest pipes in the organ and having up to four mitred joints each, the trombone resonators suffered some of the worst damage. Most of the mitres were either broken or cracked and some areas were reduced to splinters. To the right, is shown a small section of a resonator undergoing repair. Where breaks are clean, it is possible to carefully re-make the joint using traditional hot glue. Problems occur when old repairs have been carried out with white glue and nails, all of which have to be painstakingly removed if a suc-



cessful new joint is to be made.

Sometimes, pieces, or in this case, whole sections, are too badly damaged to allow a reliable and airtight repair.

In the photograph to the left, a whole new section has been made to replace one which had been badly damaged on impact with the road. Old repairs, carried out with nails, which were rusted into the wood, and splintered edges, meant that replacement was the only practical option. Naturally, the new piece is made to the old dimensions and from matching materials.

RW

