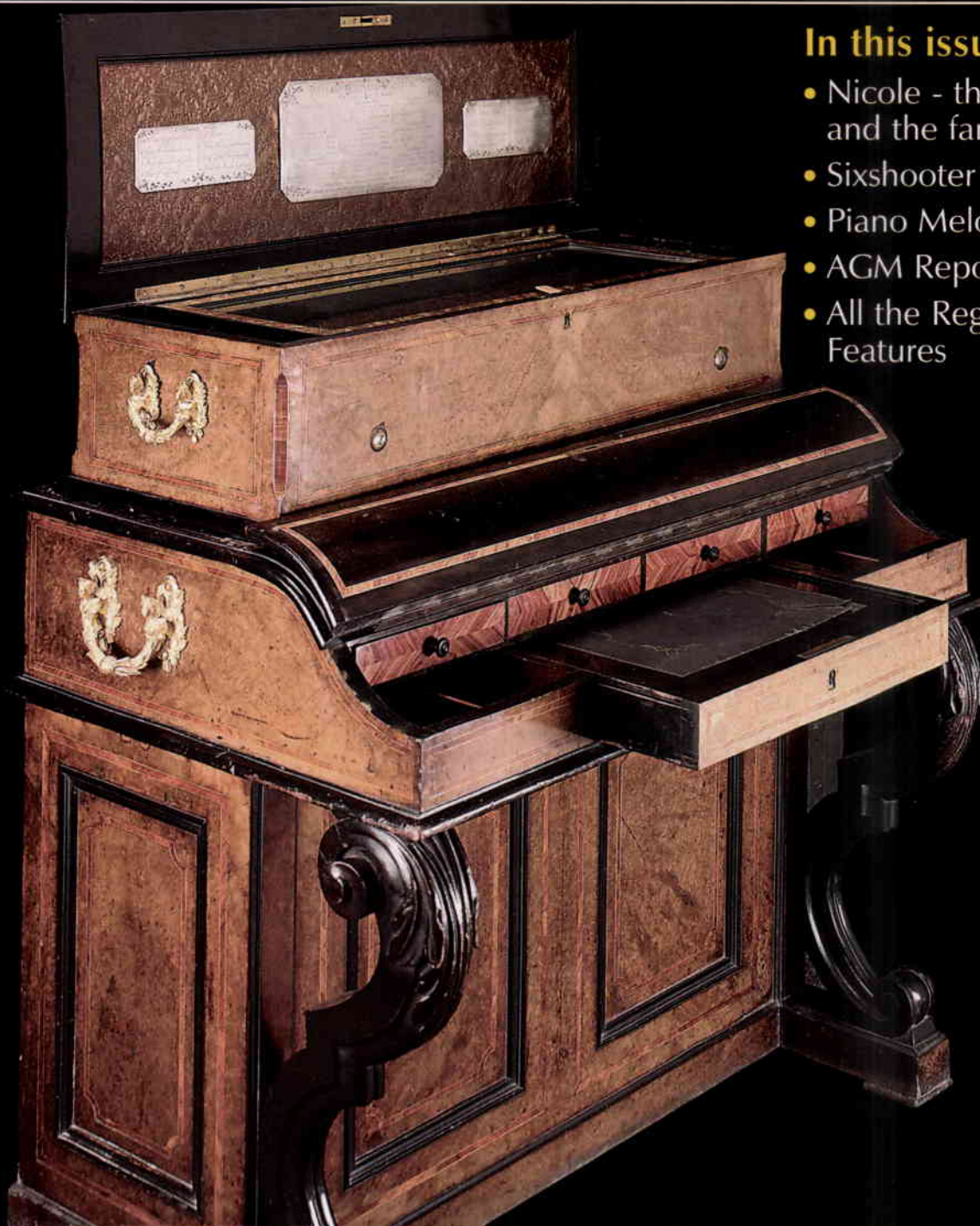


The **Music Box**

Volume 21 Number 3 Autumn 2003
Edited by Alan Pratt

An International Journal of Mechanical Music



In this issue:

- Nicole - the boxes and the family
- Sixshooter - (Part 2)
- Piano Melodico
- AGM Report
- All the Regular Features

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The Pursuit of Knowledge



Alan Pratt

One of the pleasures of belonging to the Musical Box Society is the access to so much information. It is not in the nature of everyone to embark on detailed research on specific subjects, and yet those who undertake these exacting tasks share that knowledge freely with other members.

The article on the Nicole family by Roy Ison in this issue is a case in point. Reading this fascinating piece, it is clear that a huge amount of time and effort have gone into this project, but Roy shares the results with us all. More than that, he presents his findings for scrutiny, inviting comments and even corrections, suggesting that someone, somewhere may have another piece which can be added to the jigsaw puzzle of our knowledge.

At every meeting, the 'old hands' can be heard giving advice and help to those less experienced, encouraging newcomers and

thus ensuring that hard-won knowledge is not lost. Unless we pass on knowledge, it is wasted. To hoard knowledge or information is the very antithesis of what the Musical Box Society is all about – an unselfish sharing of the pleasures we get from our hobby. Every one of our contributors is sharing his/her knowledge with us. And by publishing in *The Music Box* we ensure that it remains available to all.

And now I am going to have a small grumble! I know this has been said before, but can we please remember that what we collect/write about are musical boxes – not music boxes! Just as this is the Musical Box Society! Sorry if this sounds petty, but since taking over as Editor I must have corrected this many hundreds of times.

Here endeth the lesson. ■

Editor

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Our cover picture

A fine Nicole Frères grand format mandolin musical box No. 46628, with eleven 16-inch cylinders playing four airs each (variations, overtures and two-per-turn), in walnut case with engraved silvered tune program and cylinder storage in the matching writing desk.

This box is to be sold in Christie's Mechanical Music sale on 29th October.

Picture courtesy of Christie's

The Editor welcomes articles, letters and other contributions for publication in the Journal. The Editor expressly reserves the right to amend or refuse any of the foregoing.

Any contribution is accepted on the understanding that its author is solely responsible for the opinions expressed in it and the publication of such contributions does not necessarily imply that any such opinions therein are those of the Society or its Editor.

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society news and topics

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Society AGM - 2003

Precis of Minutes

The A.G.M. of the Society was held on the 7th June 2003 at the Village Hall in Roade, Northants.

Apologies for absence

There were 7 apologies for absence received.

Minutes of the previous A.G.M.

The minutes of the 2002 A.G.M. were accepted as a true record and there were no matters arising.

President's Report

Christopher Proudfoot looked back over the year and noted that we had held several memorable meetings. Sadly he had to report that a number of members had died during the year. On a more cheerful note, Christopher looked forward to the joint meeting with the American Society in 2005. He reported that the Publications Committee were making good progress in their latest venture. Christopher concluded by thanking those members who had contributed in any way to the running of the Society.

Report of the Subscriptions Secretary

Richard Kerridge reported that the membership now stood at 499. This was a reduction on last year. 337 come from the U.K., 62 from Europe, 72 from the U.S.A., 5 from Canada and 23 from Australia and the Far East. As of the date of the AGM, 438 members had renewed their subscriptions with a good number still to pay.

Membership and Correspondence Secretary's Report

Alan Wyatt noted a general decline in membership during the year, but had seen encouraging signs that this year we were holding our own. Correspondence was coming in at an average of one letter per week. He answered all these letters promptly.

Report of the Meetings Secretary

Roy Ison said that the Autumn meeting in the Lake District was quickly being booked up and all arrangements were well in hand. The 2004 Spring meeting at Canterbury was in the process of being organised. A meeting and a venue

New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to the Society:-

2834 Paul Davis, Essex

2835 Mrs Ann Blunn, Hants

2836 James Dean, Warks

2837 Mrs Caroline Willis, Derby

2838 R.C.Lodge, Surrey

2839 Johan Goyvaerts, Belgium

2840 Jeffrey Hopwood, Norfolk

2841 John Dyer, Beds

for the 2004 Autumn meeting had yet to be arranged.

Report of the Hon. Treasurer

Richard Kerridge reported a deficit of £1,683.65 for the year. There had been a variety of reasons for this deficit. Among these were a fall in membership and declining interest rates. However, the Society did have assets of over £29,000.

Report of the Archivist

Kevin McElhone reported a quieter year. This had enabled him to make good progress in the listing of tunes for disc machines. Kevin welcomed John Farmer who would shortly be taking over as the new Archivist.

Report of the Auction Organiser

David Walch told the meeting that just over £900 had been raised at the 2002 auction. He wished to thank all who had helped him to stage the event. Members then expressed their thanks to David and Daphne for their efforts in what is a mammoth task.

Subscriptions

The Committee proposed that the level of subscriptions remain the same for another year with the Committee undertaking a review in the Spring of next year. At this stage, it was proposed that as from 1st January 2004, the joining fee be scrapped. This was passed by the membership.

Election of Officers

The Officers of the Society were re-elected. Robert Hough had indicated that he would retire from the Committee, but said that he would continue to help in the editorial department. Daphne Ladell and Nicholas Simons were elected to the Committee. Their names and duties are listed elsewhere in the Journal.

A.O.B.

Alan Pratt, the Editor, presented his thoughts on revising the publication dates for the Journal. After some discussion, it was decided to refer the matter back to the Committee for further debate.

Daphne Ladell spoke on the 2005 joint meeting with the Americans. She made an appeal for volunteers to help with the running of this important event.



Auction viewing

A Society member noted the need to police the Society web site to try to stop unwanted material being placed there. Action would be taken on this matter.

Ted Brown handed out Register forms and asked members to co-operate in the Register venture.

Finally, it was noted that John Powell has completed the new magazine index covering Vols.1-20 and this would be available in the not too distant future.

Sussex Open Day

The annual summer pilgrimage to Ted and Kay Brown's Old School at Bucks Green took place under a leaden sky; so much so that the programme of events had to be kept flexible to suit the elements. With careful juggling, we avoided the worst of the weather.

Peter Murray provided us with a most entertaining account of research work he has been conducting on the burial of Daniel Imhof, (partner of Mukle in the famous organ building company). There is no headstone on Imhof's grave in Queen's Road cemetery Croydon, but identification was possible from a plot number provided by the authorities. Imhof's wife Anna Elizabeth is also buried in this family grave. Peter's account was both informative and entertaining, covering aspects such as the length of coffin required for the tall gentleman, the depth of the grave, the cost of the funeral and the fact that two pairs of horses were used to haul the hearse. We were treated to a vivid description of Peter's journey into the depths of the funeral parlour and his search through musty and dust laden leather-bound ledgers to extract the relevant

information from the year 1900. It is hoped that Peter will treat us all to a more detailed account of his exploits, by writing an article for a future issue of our Journal.

Daphne Ladell entertained us with an animated display performed by a large number of her automata. She claimed her car had only sufficient room to bring something like one quarter of her collection but, tightly packed, these occupied a table measuring some 8 feet by 4 feet! No matter whether they were old or new, each had its own individual character and even those which just would not stop playing were still held in high esteem as they were carried away to wind down their last vestiges of life in a distant room. Daphne expressed the true spirit of a collector when she told us her motivation for collecting automata – "If I like it, I buy it. It doesn't have to be old nor does it have to come from a maker of high repute."

Following a most satisfying mid-day meal it was time to venture out-of-doors for playing the organs. Wind tried to topple the umbrellas but the grinders persisted with their handle turning – not one of them daring to mimic the earlier teddy bear automata by playing 'I'm forever blowing bubbles' (see picture). Despite the dampness, the efforts of those who had brought their organs were much appreciated by the listeners.

The next two Chancetonbury Ring meetings are scheduled for 10th August and 19th October, and the Christmas Open Day is on Saturday 29th November. Please let Ted Brown know if you want to book your place.

Autumn Meeting 2003

There has been a great deal of interest in the Lakeland meeting which is due to be held 12th-14th September. All of the visits have been organised, meeting places booked and coaches ordered. Both the Heaves Hotel and the Gilpin Bridge Hotel are now fully booked and some members have been found suitable accommodation in nearby Kendal.

Those members who have not already made any booking arrangements need not despair as bed and breakfast accommodation can still be found. Contact Roy Ison as soon as possible. He will then put you in touch with me to see what can be arranged.

Someone made a telephone booking for a twin bedded room at the Gilpin Bridge Hotel quite early on. Unfortunately, they just said they were members of the Musical Box Society and did not give their name. The Manager of the hotel did not ask for any name, so we are now left with not knowing who is coming to this room and not knowing if they have ordered a Society dinner. If you think this may be you, please contact Roy or myself as soon as possible.

Detailed maps and information sheets will be sent out to all who have booked for the meeting nearer to the meeting date. For those who are staying for the whole week, the information sheet will be considerably larger and give details of what is planned for each day. The steam Gondola is booked for three quarters of an hour trip on Lake Coniston subject to the weather conditions being right.

We now have three speakers for the talks on Sunday morning who will hopefully complement each other.

Autumn Meeting 2005 – The Big One!

As many of you are already aware, we have been asked to host the Musical Box International Meeting in August 2005. This will also incorporate our own normal Autumn meeting.

For many reasons (transport, accommodation, etc.) we have selected the southeast area of England as being the most suitable for our visitors. As we are expecting about 400 people to attend, it has

been extremely difficult to find an hotel that can provide all the facilities that we require. In the end I have chosen and booked the Holiday Inn at Guildford, Surrey, which is central for our planned event.

At the same time I have booked Guildford University for the use of their theatre on the Friday night to hold an Old Time Music Hall evening as part of our planned entertainment, and also their function room for our Banquet dinner on the Saturday night.

The dates for this meeting, I would like you to put in your diary, are Thursday 25th August to Sunday 28th, this is very fortunate for us as it is a Bank Holiday weekend, which means we can run a full and varied 4 day event. We have lots of venues on offer and plenty to keep everyone happy, including alternative attractions for the partners of our members who may not have the same avid interest in mechanical music.

We have already had offers from a number of members who are interested in giving demonstrations and talks, but we are still looking for a wider range of subjects, so, if you are interested in giving a talk or demonstration, we will be delighted to hear from you.

This meeting is the largest we have ever held and we need volunteers to help with organising and undertaking all sorts of jobs, both before and during the event, partners as well please. We are very confident that this event will be very special. If you think you can help us, please write to me and let me know.

Much has already been done, but there are very many items that still need to be arranged and prices to be agreed. However, by the Spring 2004 edition of the Journal we will be able to give a definite figure of final costs per person.

Daphne Ladell, Committee Member
The Hollies, Box Hill Road
Tadworth, Surrey KT20 7LA
Daphne.Ladell@btinternet.com

Our Archivist Retires

After ten years in the job Kevin McElhone has stepped down as the Society Archivist and had this to say...

"I would like to give a big thank

you to all members who, over the past ten years, have supported me in the task of Archivist of MBSGB. I have enjoyed the job and learned a great deal.

The amount of material now available is quite large and probably constitutes one of the best 'libraries' available in our field, including magazines from many Societies dating back to their foundation - such as MBSI in 1949/50.

We can always do with more items - auction catalogues, books, original or photo-copies of original makers roll/disc catalogues, videos, audio recordings and so forth.

I have now handed over to John Farmer who has been a member for over six years. He is centrally situated, in Kidderminster, and will be able to accommodate visitors by appointment in a couple of months time, once everything is sorted and filed away in his spare room.

My thanks to John for taking over the post and for giving me some more space to fill with instruments! I hope to remain on the Committee as there are many other jobs to do in the future."

Kevin McElhone

Web Site Update

The MBSGB web site presently receives about 1,000 visitors each week. Here are just a few of the features you will find on the site.

Message Board

The message board is the most active part of the site with many people leaving messages and enquiries on it; unfortunately we have had several messages left advertising unsavoury web sites. We are doing our best to delete these as they appear, but as we cannot do this every day would you please e-mail* me should you see one so that it can be removed. The message board is there for your use; quite a few members and non members advertise musical boxes for sale, or require restoration to a box, so you never know you may get a bargain or, if you are a restorer, get an extra client.

Most users of the page require information about a box, which they own. If you see one, which you think you can help with please make the effort and reply to it. The page is very simple to use.

When you first see the page there is a long list of message

headings, click on the one which you wish to look at, the full message will then open. If you wish to reply, go lower down the page where you will find a form for your answer.

Restorers Page

We have some restorers listed; if you would like to be added please e-mail* your details to me. Also, if you know anybody who can offer a service, which would be useful to members, do let me know. (For example I recently found a bookbinder who made an excellent job of restoring a musical photograph album spine, so he was listed on our site).

Museum Page

Please e-mail* me if you have a museum or collection which may be visited. It would be helpful to have opening times, and any restrictions regarding group visits, advance booking, prices or information about access for wheelchairs etc.

Auction House Page

If you wish to be added to the page please e-mail* details. Contacts and e-mail addresses are very helpful to anybody requiring a valuation or catalogue.

News Page

We have not always been able to keep this page up to date, as I got the work done as a favour and the person was not always available. However, we have now installed a content management program, which will allow me to amend this page myself, directly from Microsoft Word pages, which I receive from our Journal editor.

Contact Page

We receive quite a large number of enquiries from all over the world, from people who have bought or inherited a musical box and want to know something about it. We try to answer all the enquiries by asking various members for their help, and normally suggest that they might like to join the Society. It is often difficult to know whom to ask in the Society for information about different types of mechanical music. If you feel that you might be able to help with answers in a particular field of mechanical

music, please let me know so that we can add you to our list.

We are sometimes asked where a musical box can be restored, in which case they are referred to advertisers in our Journal. Another frequent request is for a modern movement with a particular tune on it, in which case they are also referred to our advertisers.

Answering these enquiries is a job which I share with Keith Reedman.

Membership Page

We do obtain some new members from the web site; however this is disappointingly few. We plan to add a moving text to the home page, which we hope will bring the suggestion of membership to the attention of our visitors.

Guest Book

This is not a greatly used page, Most entries are comments about the site, nearly all of these have praised the site.

Robert Ducat-Brown

*E-mail address: bob@webtechnic.co.uk

Web site www.mbsgb.org.uk

Childrens Ward - Polyphon Project

Alan Wyatt writes to express his thanks to members for their support

of this project. Items in the Society Auction donated for this raised over £1300, and donations from members plus the raffle raised a further £966. We are still looking for a further £500 so if you are in a fund-raising mood, please bear this project in mind.

Further details, if required, from Alan Wyatt

Grand Roller Organ Cobs

Most MBSI & MBSGB members will be aware of the project undertaken by Walter & Charles Moore in Dallas to make new 20 note Gem and Concert Roller Organ cobs. This has grown so they now have over 130 titles available.

The NEXT project is to make the Grand Roller Organ 32 note cobs and some feedback is needed from collectors and owners of these machines before selecting what titles to 'read' into the computer system to create copies.

Perhaps you would write to me or e-mail me at kevinmcelhone@supanet.com with the 10 tunes you would most prefer to have produced from the list of cobs originally made. This list may be found at: www.rollerorgans.com ■

Correction

Oh dear! The gremlins were really at work in our last issue. In the article on the Flight Robson organ (P56/58), fig.5 was not as stated – it was, in fact, another version of fig.3. The correct picture is reproduced (right) showing the organ in its new home. Apologies to Roy Ison.

Also, the Index included with the last issue contained information from Vol.19 not Vol.20. A revised version is being sent out with this issue. Please destroy the earlier one to avoid confusion.



The Flight Robson in its new home.

society news and topics

In our next issue

- Someone is Cross in the Workshop
- Making your own Music Discs
- Plus all the regular features



New Index

As mentioned in the AGM report, John Powell has produced a full Index for all issues of *The Music Box* covering Vols. 1 to 20.

Not everyone is able to acquire a full set of all issues, and indeed not everyone could find the space to store them. To have a full Index is the next best thing, for then if you are looking for information on a special instrument or box you can see what has been published. From Adler to Zither – its all in there!

Not having the particular issue – when you have found the item in the Index – presents no problem. Our Archivist holds copies of every issue of *The Music Box* and can provide photo copies on request of any page or article.

Our thanks go to John Powell for undertaking this task. Copies of the Index are available from Richard Kerridge priced £9.00 – plus p&p £1.50 (UK) Email for overseas rates.

Editor

The City of London

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Boxes by Francois Nicole & Freres Nicole

by Roy Ison

The purpose of this article is to try to clear some of the confusion that surrounds musical boxes made by Francois Nicole and those made by Freres Nicole during the period of 1815 to 1834.

The problems occur with boxes which were made by Francois Nicole from about 1820 to 1827. After 1827 most of the musical boxes by this maker had the comb marked *Francis Nicole*, before 1827 the musical boxes by this maker sometimes had a comb stamp of *F Nicole* or in some cases had no name stamp at all. What all these boxes by Francois Nicole had in common was a square pattern cylinder marking. The cylinder had both vertical and horizontal lines giving the effect of producing a small square pattern on the surface of the cylinder (fig.1). This type of box in the past has been known as rigid notation or graphic notation. The reason for the square pattern cylinder marking is not at all clear; some collectors and restorers think it had some use in pinning the cylinder but Francois Nicole seems to be the only maker to use this marking. Another view is that it may well be a type of trademark or a method of identifying special order boxes made by Francois Nicole. For the rest of this article all this type of box will be referred to as square pattern cylinder boxes.

Francois Nicole was born April 1st 1766 to Susann Marie Golay and Pierre Nicole and baptised on April 17th 1766 at Chenit, Vallee de Joux Vaud, Switzerland. He had one older brother, David Louis Philippe, born August 26th 1764.

David and Francois were described as horologers en musique working at Nyon in 1787, moving to Geneva in 1796. On the death of the boys' father, Pierre Nicole, David and Francois came under the guardianship of Daniel Piguët, marchand and horologer, and later David Golay who was also an

horologer, brother of Susann Golay, their mother. David Golay left in his will 6928 Florins, a substantial amount, for the two brothers who were working as horologers in Nyon at the time. They also received monies from the estates of their

father and grandfather. This would give the brothers capital to establish a workshop.

Francois Nicole had seven children by his marriage to Marie Magniet. They were: Francois Louise Elizabeth, b.1793, who

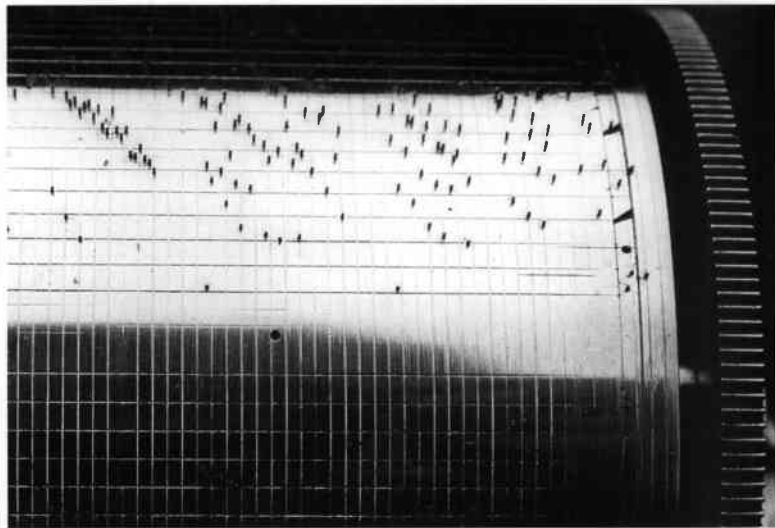


Fig. 1. Square pattern on cylinder.



Fig. 2. Grooved Ring.

...Francois Nicole seems to be the only maker to use this marking.

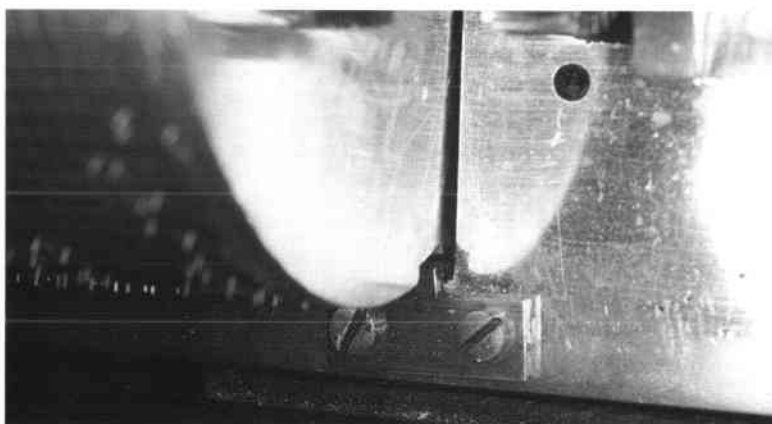


Fig. 3. Claw for grooved ring.

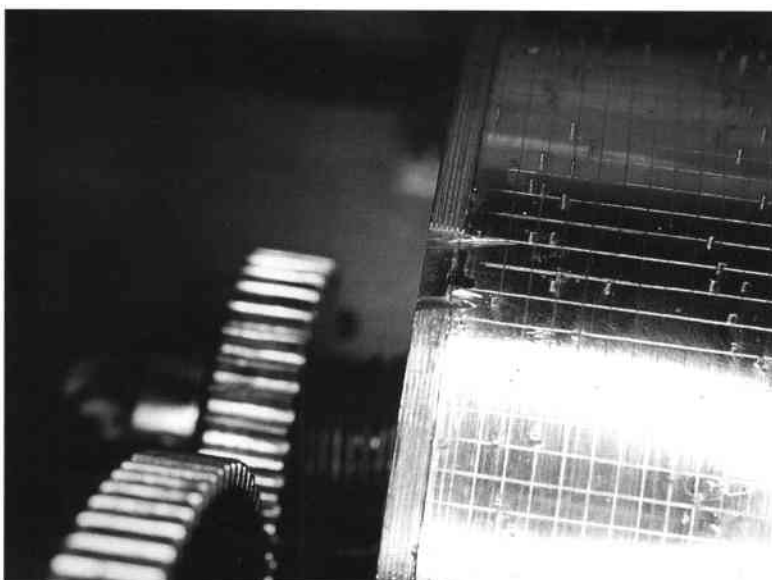


Fig. 4. Gap in grooved ring.

...producing
steel that
compares
advantageously
with English
steel.

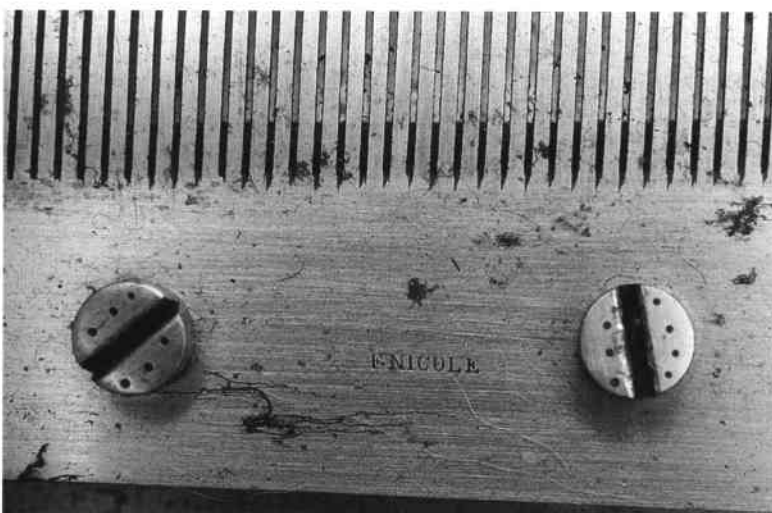


Fig. 5.

married Francois Louis Lecoultre; the second daughter, Cesarine Anorienne Louise, b.1795, who married Henri Francois Reymond (later known as Reymond Nicole); the third daughter, Ami Matthieu, b. 1796 d. 1802; Jean Louis Philippe

b.1800 d. 1875; Francois Louis Andre b. 1804 d.1805; Marie Louise Francoise b.1806 d.1808; Francois Louis b.1808 d.1862. From the names of the parents and the children it can be seen the complications and confusions which arise.

David Nicole was unmarried and lived at the works site, Rue des Etuves 130. Just around the corner at Rue Rousseau 60 lived Francois Nicole with his two sons, neither of whom was involved in the making of musical boxes. Also in the same building lived his second daughter, Cesarine, with her husband, Henri Francois Reymond (Reymond Nicole), his other daughter Francois Louise Elizabeth, with her husband Francois Louis Lecoultre, also lived on another floor in the same house.

David Nicole participated with Jacques and Francois Lecoultre in the establishment of a forge in Chenit in 1811. Around 1812 a letter addressed by the local council to the Department of the Interior of the Canton of Vaud indicates that David Nicole, Jacques and Francois Lecoultre were "watchmakers and mechanics by profession of their own invention and without anybodies (sic) help in producing steel that compares advantageously with English steel." At this time English steel was held in great esteem.

The information obtained from the MBSGB register of boxes has been very useful but not all owners have given full details regarding the name of the early boxes; for example, boxes made between 1815 and 1830 are listed as Nicole Freres but should have been recorded as Freres Nicole as stamped on the bedplate of the movement. Other details such as cylinder dimensions, number of teeth on the comb and tune identification (when known) are also often missing.

In the register three boxes have been listed with a date stamp on the spring. They are serial number 7279 date 1826, serial number 8346 date 1828 and serial number 15723 date 1834, also a box presented in 1840 serial number 19020. This type of information is very useful in an attempt to fix a date to serial numbers. If a starting date of 1815 is taken as the first box in the register with a serial number of 337 then from this date to 1826, the first spring dated box, it can reasonably be assumed that 650 boxes were made per year. Then from around 1827 to 1830 about 750 per year were made and from 1830 to 1840

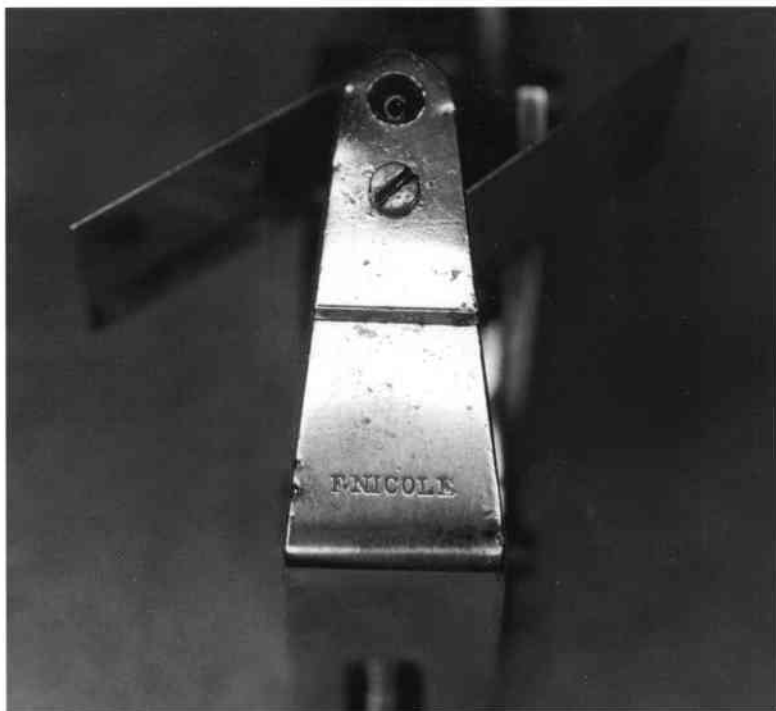


Fig. 6.

about 850 boxes per year were made. As more musical boxes are registered this may well need updating.

From 1815 to 1840 only 122 musical boxes have been recorded in the register to date. The period from 1815 to 1821 is where the first cartel box is recorded in the register with a serial number 3570; all the boxes recorded before this date are snuff boxes, 26 in number, apart from 2 cartel boxes, the first being serial number 3570 followed by serial number 3762. Both of these boxes play overtures and have

cylinder lengths of 23 cms and have similar features to the Francois Nicole boxes which were also being made about 1821/1822. Boxes 3570 and 3762 have fine combs, 21 teeth to the inch, the combs on both boxes are stamped F Nicole. Box 3762 plays one overture on two turns and two airs on the third turn, the combs have 200 teeth. Both boxes have Freres Nicole stamped on the bedplate (fig.10) and box 3570 has a three section comb. Both of these boxes are very similar to the type of box being made by Francois Nicole at

this time, visually the main difference is the square pattern cylinder and the grooved cylinder ring on the left hand side. Boxes made by Francois Nicole were not stamped on the bedplate, sometimes the combs were stamped F Nicole. From 1821 to 1832 nineteen snuffboxes have been registered and eleven cartel boxes; after 1832 no more snuff boxes have been recorded. The manufacture of snuffboxes by Freres Nicole appears to have stopped after 1832, after which all boxes seem to have been of the cartel type including movements for clocks and automata.

The total number of boxes made from 1815 to 1840 would be about 19000 although the register holds only 122 so far recorded. In 1823 the ordinary comb of a two-air snuffbox had about 70 teeth and was 2.5 inches (6.5 cms) long. Larger one piece combs were being made at this time, but not many. In 1823 the larger comb represented only 7% of the total production. In 1826 the largest one-piece comb being manufactured was 8.5 inches (21.5 cms.) long. Looking at the above statistic, two cartel boxes and twenty-four snuffboxes, gives a similar percentage of comb production. Only greater exchange of information will help to better this result.

From 1815 to 1820 the output of musical movements by Freres Nicole was mainly to satisfy the demand for snuffboxes. This was due to the difficulty in producing the larger one-piece combs which would be required for the cartel box, the alternative was to use a sectional comb. In 1814 a larger one-piece comb was developed by Francois Lecoultre and this improvement was in general use by 1818. This coupled with the earlier invention of the spring damper by Francois Nicole allowed the manufacture of larger cartel musical boxes, and so from 1820 the cartel box was being made in small numbers. At the same time cartel boxes were being made by Freres Nicole, all of which had a serial number stamped on the front of the bedplate, a comb marked F Nicole and a bedplate stamped Freres Nicole on the top left hand

The total number of boxes made from 1815 to 1840 would be about 19000 although the register holds only 122 so far recorded.



Fig. 7.

corner (fig.10). Also at this time Francois Nicole was making a cartel box of similar design and this had cylinder lines both vertical and horizontal which had the effect of showing a small square pattern over the surface of the cylinder (fig1), the normal conventional cylinder

box had only vertical lines. The square pattern cylinders do have other build differences from the conventional boxes. Apart from the square pattern marks on the cylinder nearly all have a grooved ring fitted to the left hand side of the cylinder (fig.2). This method

has also been found on a box made by Falconnet This grooved ring locates onto a steel claw fitted to the top left hand side of the bedplate (fig.3). This arrangement controls the alignment of the cylinder and keeps it in register. At the end of each revolution there is a gap in the grooved ring (fig.4) which allows the cylinder to move to the next tune position; there are other differences which will be explained later when individual boxes are described in detail. The identity of the maker of some of these earlier square pattern cylinder boxes cannot always be authenticated as some do not have a name on the comb or any maker's mark or number on the bedplate or anywhere on the build. The early boxes, around 1820-1826, sometimes have F Nicole stamped on either the comb (fig.5) or on the governor cock (fig.6) or on both but sometimes no marks at all. Boxes after about 1827-1834 do have their combs stamped Francs Nicole (fig.7) but never on the bedplate. Further differences between earlier and later boxes appear to be in their comb design. The earlier period boxes mostly seem to have four part combs (fig.8) comprising a bass section with around 4-6 teeth, a lower section of 90-100 teeth, then an upper section of 90-100 teeth and, finally, a small treble section with 6-10 teeth. From the data collected about musical boxes of this early type with square pattern cylinders most have the comb or governor cock marked F Nicole and others have no mark or stamp anywhere.

The information collected from private collections and sales catalogues throughout Europe and the USA shows that musical boxes with the four part combs fall into the period of 1820-1827. The music played and identified on some of these early boxes is of overtures and operatic airs composed in or before this period; none after 1827 have been found to date on these early boxes.

From about 1827-1834 the comb design changed, the four part comb was replaced with the two part comb (fig.9) for the larger boxes of cylinder length 12 inches and diameter 3 inches. This must

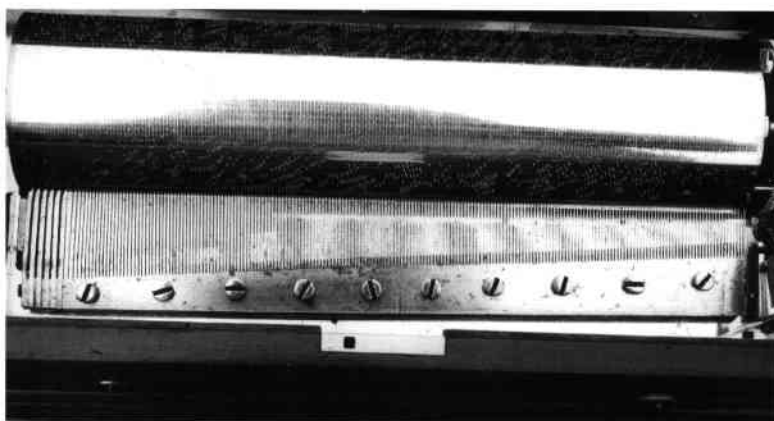


Fig. 8. Four part comb.

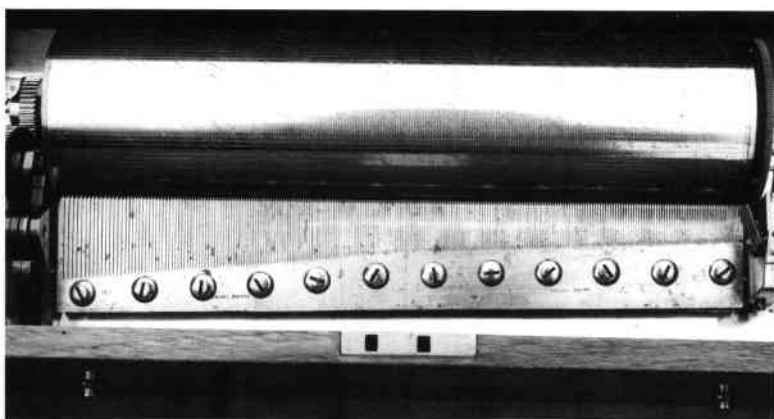


Fig. 9. Two part comb.



Fig. 10.

The identity of the maker of some of these earlier square pattern cylinder boxes cannot always be authenticated...

have been due to the improved development of comb technology. These larger boxes also played early Rossini and Mozart overtures but were often mixed with later ones by Auber or Mayerbeer dated 1830-1831, so a dating system for

overtures or operatic airs of "not before" can be used. With these later boxes the comb was signed Franc^s Nicole (fig.7); there were also smaller movements made in this period for clock bases and smaller cartel boxes.

Different types of square pattern cylinder boxes

Over the past ten years a survey on the square pattern cylinder boxes made by Francois Nicole has been carried out. A total of twenty-four boxes have been found in private collections in Europe, UK and USA.

The next series of boxes to be described are all of the square pattern cylinder type. They range from the early simple fruitwood cased ones with a four-section comb through to the later two-section comb and larger cylinders.

The two early boxes found in the survey have simple fruitwood cases with the usual 3 control levers protruding from the left hand side of the case; they both have a four section comb, square pattern cylinder and a grooved ring on the left hand side (fig.2). Box 1 plays 6 operatic airs by Rossini, its comb has a name stamp F Nicole and from the information supplied by the owner no other number or bedplate mark. Box 2 plays two overtures by Rossini, La Gazza Ladra parts 1 and 2 and Adelaida di Borgogna. This box has no comb name stamp, no numbers or maker's marks. Both boxes have the dot and X tooth marks at the tip end of each tooth (fig.14). The date of manufacture would be about 1820/1822. The two overtures were first performed in 1817 and the operatic airs came from two operas, Armida and Othello, first performed in 1817 and 1816.

This box has no comb name stamp, no numbers or maker's marks.

The next three boxes are a little later in the date of manufacture, about 1824-1826. The case design is of a better quality, two of them (boxes 3 and 4) being made of mahogany with brass furniture and control panel (fig.15), the third one (box 5) is contained in a clock case. Boxes 3 and 4 have similar case design, all three boxes having a similar movement build comprising a 10inch x 2.5 inch cylinder marked with 98 horizontal lines plus a tune gap of 2 lines, four section comb with 210 teeth marked with dot and cross on the tooth tips. Box 3 plays Der Freischutz by Weber first performed in 1821 and L Italiana in Algeri first performed in 1813. Der Freischutz is played on two full turns of the cylinder and the L Italiana in Algeri on one turn of the cylinder.

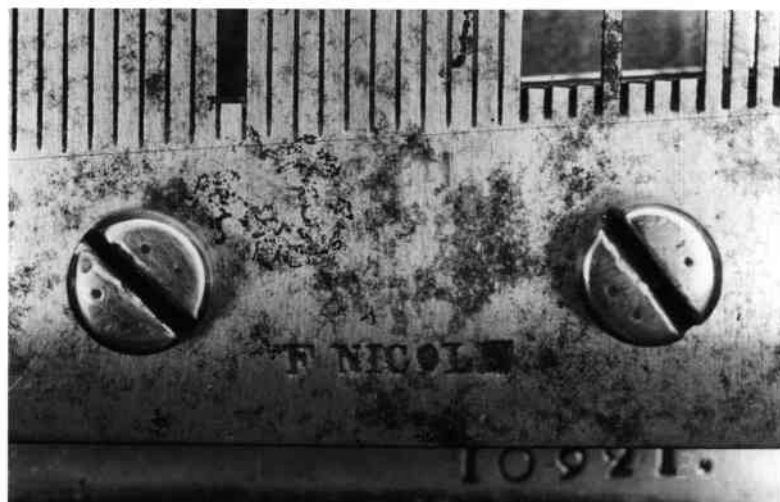


Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.

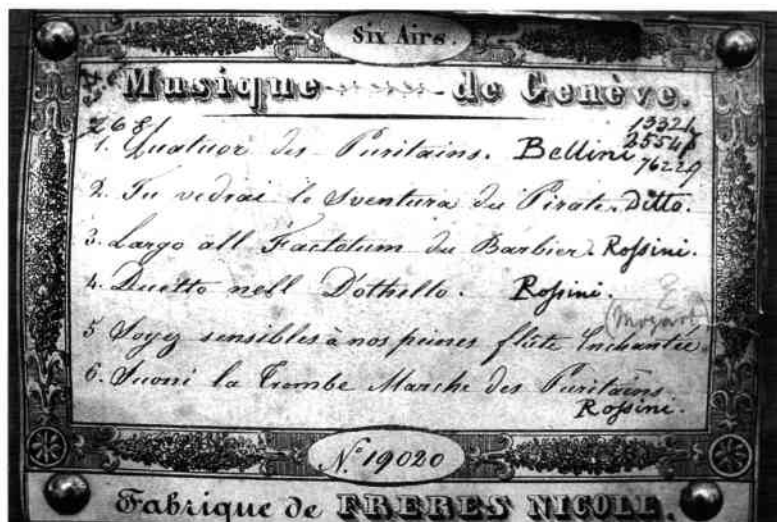


Fig. 13.

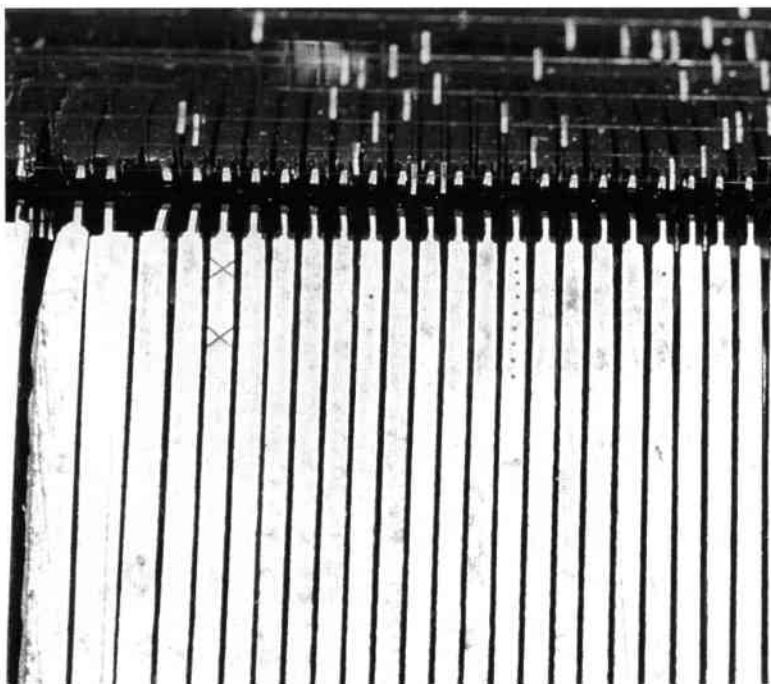


Fig. 14. Dot and x tooth marking.



Fig. 15. Control panel.

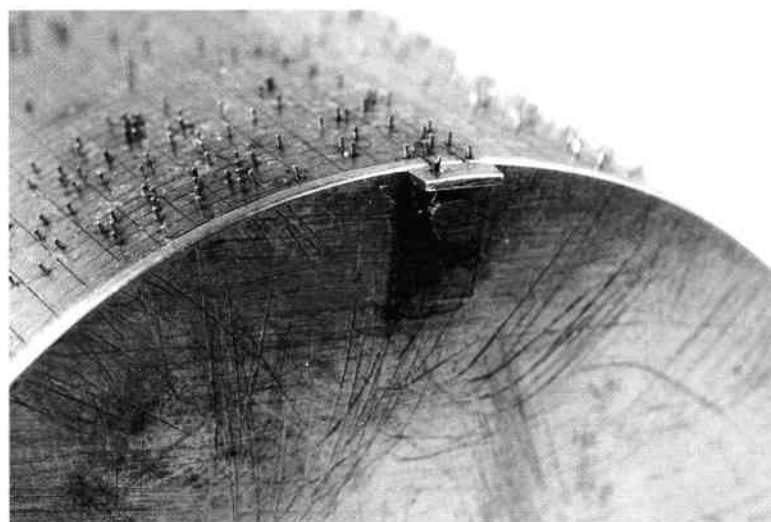


Fig. 16. Extra pin.

The unusual method of playing the two overtures in box 3 is often found in early Francois Nicole boxes. The first tune pinned on the cylinder is the last part of *Der Freischutz*, the second tune is *L Italiana in Algeri* and the third tune is the first part of *Der Freischutz* which completes the full programme on three complete turns of the cylinder. Boxes 4 and 5 play a similar programme which includes *L Italiana in Algeri*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Der Freischutz*; each overture is played on one complete turn of the cylinder. With this group of boxes care must be taken when the movement is removed from the case as there is no support for the bedplate; therefore if the movement is put down on a bench the complete movement rests on the underside of the cylinder. This can obviously cause damage to the cylinder pins.

From about 1827 to 1835 some larger boxes were made with cylinders 12inch x 3inches, with the comb constructed in two parts (fig.9) with a total of 246 teeth or more in some cases. Box 6 has a cylinder of 12 inch x 3.25 inches marked with 114 horizontal lines with a tune gap equal to 3 lines. It has a two part comb, 115 teeth in the lower section and 131 teeth in the upper section, giving a total of 246 teeth. With this type of comb every tenth tooth is marked with a dot on the bottom of the tooth (fig.7). This type of later comb is always signed *Francs Nicole*. This particular box plays two overtures and a waltz, *Fra Diavolo* by Auber 1830 on one and a half turns of the cylinder, *Robert le Diable* by Meyerbeer 1831 on one full turn of the cylinder, and *du Duc de Reichstadt* by Straus on half a turn of the cylinder. On this box the second instant stop control lever is fitted to the left hand side of the case.

There are throughout the manufacturing period a number of movements that have been fitted into clock bases; they seem to cover the full build range. They all have the usual features associated with Francois Nicole, square pattern cylinder, fine combs in two or four part construction, but no

The unusual method of playing the two overtures in box 3 is often found in early Francois Nicole boxes.

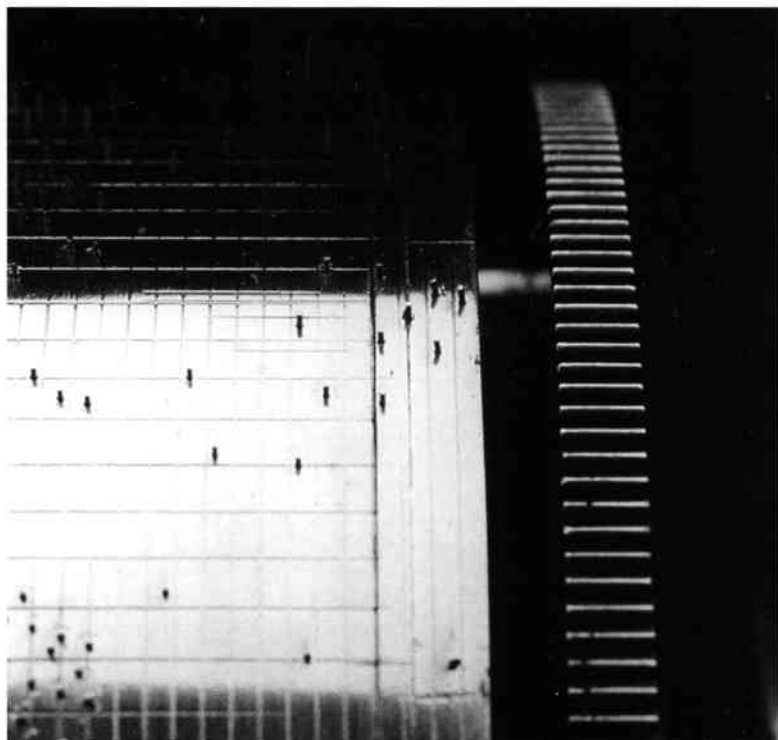


Fig. 17. Extra pins in end cap.

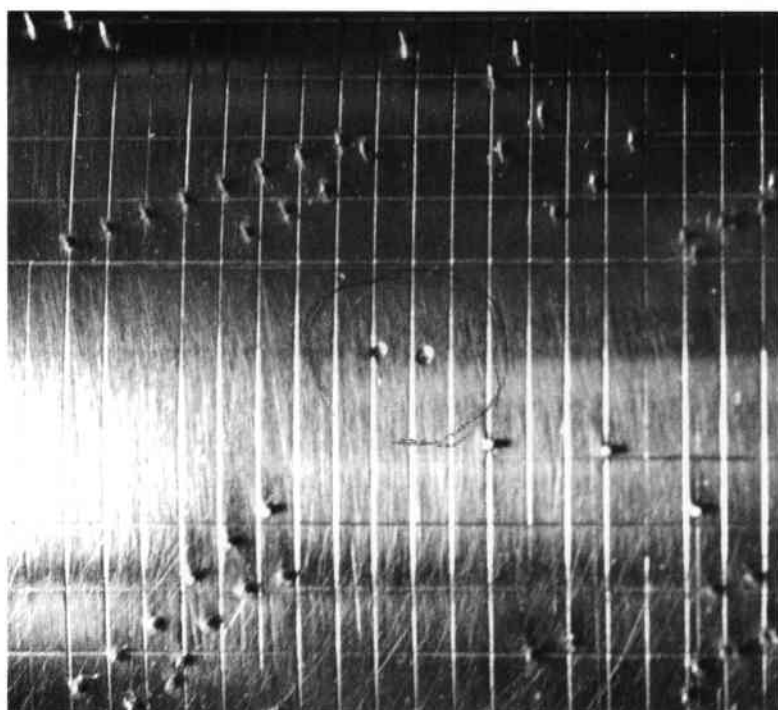


Fig. 18. Registration dots.

second instant stop is fitted to these movements. Also on some movements the grooved ring on the left hand side of the cylinder is missing.

There are a few more build/design features peculiar to Francois Nicole movements which are worth noting:

1. A small extension at the end of the cylinder which is made to

accommodate just one pin (fig.16) so that this can be used in the musical arrangement when the pinning of the cylinder is undertaken.

2. Often a few extra cylinder pins are fitted to cylinder end cap (fig.17).

3. There are no normal registration dots along the cylinder tune gap, often just two dots in the centre

of the cylinder (fig.18) and a single dot on the far left of the cylinder.

4. Early boxes have the tooth tips marked with a cross and dot symbol (fig.14).

5. The later two part combs have every tenth tooth marked with a single dot at the base of the tooth (fig.7).

6. The second instant stop is often fitted to the right hand side key compartment and to the left hand side of the case in later boxes. This second instant stop is used to lock off the movement so that when the lid on the case is locked, the external start lever cannot start the movement (fig.19).

7. Early boxes have a four-part comb sometimes signed F Nicole (fig.8) but sometimes no signature. Later boxes with the two part combs are always signed Francis Nicole (fig.9).

8. No Francois Nicole box movements to date have been found with a bedplate maker's stamp.

All of the above information is based on a survey of 24 Francois Nicole squared pattern cylinder boxes discovered so far; as more boxes are located some of these statements may need to be revised.

The limited information on Francois Nicole appears to show that the four-part comb with laminated base teeth do seem to be earlier. Chapuis quotes from a trade show report in 1828, "Francois Nicole had resumed making larger boxes with up to 244 teeth and more".

It would appear that the earlier boxes all had three or four part laminated combs, some signed F Nicole and others not signed at all. From the data so far collected from 24 Francois Nicole boxes found to date there does not seem to be an obvious numerical numbering system. Occasionally numbers are stamped on the bedplate but not necessarily, but all of the boxes do have the square pattern cylinder marks, which could be considered as a typical Francois Nicole trademark. After 1827/28 all combs are stamped Francis Nicole; at this time Francois Nicole would be 63 years old and nearing the end of his musical box production.



Fig. 19. Movement locking lever.

After 1835 no
other square
pattern cylinder
boxes were
made...

Conclusions

From the information collected certain facts start to appear:

- When a cylinder box movement has a square pattern cylinder with either the comb or the governor cock, or both, marked F Nicole then it is more than likely to have been made by Francois Nicole. In Geneva in the early 19th century, the custom was to put the initial of the Christian name first, before the family name. Using all the data collected from private collections and the MBSGB register it can be seen that from 1820 to 1834 Frere Nicole were producing similar cartel boxes to Francois Nicole

except that the Frere Nicole boxes only had normal vertical cylinder lines. Also their boxes all had a name stamp of Frere Nicole on the top left hand corner of the bedplate (fig.10) and a serial number stamped on the front of the bedplate (fig.11). The serial numbers follow in sequence the manufacture of boxes.

- From all of the twenty four boxes so far located made by Francois Nicole no bedplate stamp has ever been found and there does not appear to be a dedicated serial number system. There are numbers on some boxes

either on the bedplate or the spring barrel case, other boxes have no numbers or marks at all, but all the boxes do have a square pattern cylinder. Perhaps these boxes were special order boxes. The information collected on the comb build seems to indicate that the early square pattern cylinder boxes fall into approximately two groups. The earlier group have four piece combs made up of a small base section, containing four to six teeth, a lower section of ninety to a hundred teeth, an upper section of ninety to a hundred teeth and a treble section of six to ten teeth. These were

made from about 1820 until about 1826; the combs are sometimes signed F Nicole but not always. In 1826/1827 larger two-piece combs started to be used with about one hundred and twenty teeth in each section; these combs are nearly always stamped Franc^s Nicole. As yet no convincing explanation has been put forward to give a reason for the square patterning of the cylinder. The general view is that it could have been a trademark. Francois Nicole seems to have been the only maker to have used this method of cylinder marking. After 1835 no other square pattern cylinder boxes were made, apart from one which has so far been found with a comb marked Reymond Nicole and a square pattern cylinder but no number on the bedplate or any part of the movement. This is the only one of this type to have been discovered with this type of cylinder. The possible explanation for this could be a combined build when Francois Nicole retired; it may have been partly built by Francois and the comb work finished by Reymond Nicole. They both worked in the same building, Reymond Nicole being the son-in-law of Francois.

- From the MBSGB register all Reymond Nicole boxes have serial numbers, starting at 99 and continuing through to 786. Until this box was discovered only Francois Nicole boxes existed with square pattern cylinders.

- The firm Freres Nicole started around 1815, but whether it was Pierre Moise Nicole and David Eile Nicole or Francois and David Nicole who were the original Freres Nicole is still open to debate. From the evidence it seems more likely that Francois and David Nicole were the original Freres Nicole; they had a lot of skill and experience in musical box manufacture, including comb work and also the capital to set up the business. Due to the family connection it is possible that the second cousins Pierre Moise and David Eile joined the firm about 1820, then when David Nicole died about

1830 and Francois retired in 1834 the firm was passed on to the younger brothers.

In 1815 Francois and David Nicole would have been 49 and 51 years of age. 1815 was early for the manufacture of cartel boxes with single piece combs, as the main output at that time was snuffboxes. Both brothers had the experience in manufacturing musical movements; David was involved in comb manufacture and Francois had been involved in musical box manufacture and development, being responsible for the introduction of the steel spring damper in 1814.

Francois is also thought to have been the first to use cement filling in the cylinder.

At the same time David Eile and Pierre Moise Nicole (thought to be second cousins of Francois and David Nicole) were 23 and 28 years of age and it may have been possible that the younger brothers were employed by the older brothers. From the records in Geneva we know that there was a close relationship between the families of musical box makers.

About 1834 Francois Nicole retired, he would have been 68 years old. David, his elder brother is thought to have died about 1830. After 1834 changes in the firm began to take place. After the retirement of Francois Nicole no further square pattern cylinder boxes were made, the manufacture of snuffbox movements by Freres Nicole stopped in 1833.

A musical box made in 1835, recorded in the MBSGB register, has a comb marked Nicole Freres and the tune card is Freres Nicole. A movement made in 1837 is marked on the bedplate Nicole Freres A Geneve instead of Freres Nicole. Often at this time the combs are marked F Nicole, in fact, some movements with serial numbers in the 21000-24000 range still have F Nicole combs fitted which means that this type of comb was still being used up until 1844. This could possibly be the using up of old combs from Francois Nicole's association with the firm.

Francois Nicole died on

November 19th 1849 aged 83 years. His death certificate describes him as being "A gentleman of independent means". In the year 1838 some tune cards are still marked Freres Nicole and some Nicole Freres, for example, a six-air box, serial number 19020, date 1839, has a tune card marked Freres Nicole (fig.13) a bedplate stamped Nicole Freres A Geneve (fig.12) and a comb marked F Nicole. It was not until about 1844 that all boxes have Nicole Freres on the tune card, bedplate and comb.

All the statistics used for this article are based on a survey of a small number of known square pattern cylinder boxes by Francois Nicole in private collections and museums throughout Europe and the USA. Also details from 122 recorded boxes by Freres Nicole and Nicole Freres listed in the MBSGB Register with dates from 1815 to 1840. The choice of whether Francois and David Nicole or David Eile and Pierre Moise Nicole were the original brothers to set up the firm of Freres Nicole or later known as Nicole Freres is open for debate. Perhaps this article will generate some interest and encourage more collectors to exchange information about their boxes and any relevant ephemera. ■

Acknowledgements

1. Article on the two Lecoultries makers of cylinder musical boxes published in the MBSI Journal by Pierre Germain.
2. Information supplied from the MBSGB Register.
3. A. Chapuis. *The History of the Musical Box and of Mechanical Music*.
4. To all of the collectors from Europe and USA who have supplied information and photographic details of Francois Nicole boxes in their collections, including, Olin Tillotson, Walter Behrendt, Steve Ryder, Graham Webb, Ralph Heintz, National Museum Van Speelklok tot Pierement Utrecht, Sothebys, Etienne Blyelle-Hornigacher.

Sixshooter - Swiss Style

Part 2

by Mike Tucker & John Simpson

HOW IT WORKS: Each cylinder shaft is extended on both ends and is mounted in a slot on the carousel wheels and is held in place by a brass hinged bearing block, which is attached to the carousel wheels by two screws (See fig. 13 and 14). At the left-hand end, the shaft protrudes approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ " (20mm), and has a square arbor on its end. On this is fitted a brass disc with a diameter of 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (65mm) which is fitted with a substantial pin on its outer face $\frac{3}{4}$ " (20mm) from the edge (See Fig. 2). The pin engages with the slot in the face of the lay shaft (See Fig. 17) when the cylinder is rotated into the play position. The cylinder is then driven as the lay shaft turns.

The slot on the face of the lay shaft (See Fig. 17) is skillfully designed to allow the pin to enter from below, without damage, drive the cylinder, and allow for the escape of the drive pin from the top, as a new cylinder is rotated into the play position.

At the right-hand end of each cylinder, the shaft protrudes for $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm) (See Fig. 18) and has a brass disc 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (70mm), held by a steel pin, on the inside of the carousel i.e. between the end of the cylinder and the carousel. This disc holds the snail cam, which runs against a square peg screwed into the end cap of the cylinder, as with normal single cylinder music boxes. This disc has a cutout on the edge directly opposite to the snail cam.

The cutout is used to seat a spring loaded locking rod, which holds the cylinder to prevent it rotating (See Fig. 19). This also ensures that the unpinned area of the cylinder is located to pass the comb tongues when the carousel is rotated, avoiding damage to the

comb and providing correct engagement of the main drive pin. The locking rod extends through the right hand carousel wheel from a cam mounted on its outside face - there is one for each cylinder (See Fig. 19). The rod for the cylinder located in the playing position is released by a fixed finger. This finger is attached to the bedplate, and trips the cam allowing the cylinder to rotate and play.

The rotation of the carousel releases the cam and again locks the cylinder preventing it from rotating. The carousel cannot be rotated while any locking pin is not seated.

Restoration Notes:

The 6 barrel locking detents on the revolving gantry originally used shoulder screws, but because of the projected locking rod this tends to put a twisting force on the screws causing a jamming action, which obviously had been a big problem in the past, evident by all the attempts to improve this area.

These have now been made with an extra flanged boss to provide a positive action.

Acknowledgments

In putting together this information we have been helped by a number of collectors and members of the M.B.S.G.B. who have provided encouragement, information and tune identification, which is gratefully acknowledged.

There are however many pieces of the jigsaw still to be identified, e.g., information regarding maker, date of manufacture, other similar boxes and a complete tune listing. A recording is available to anyone wishing to assist with tune identification.

Any information to help complete the picture would be appreciated. ■

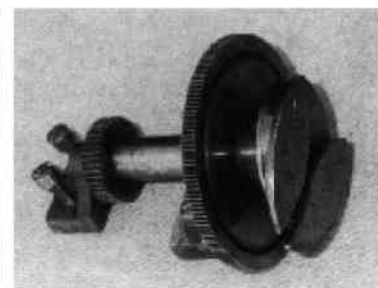


Fig. 17. Lay shaft.

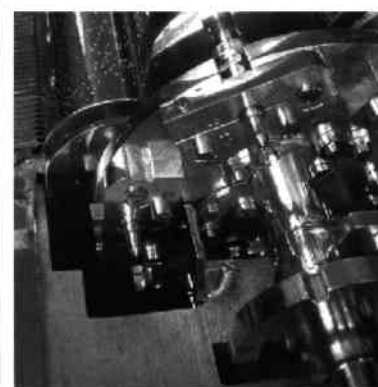


Fig. 18. End pins.

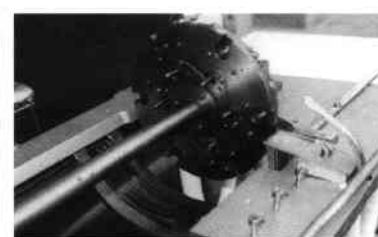


Fig. 19. Locking rod.

Please note

Do you have a box that has an interesting story attached to it? Perhaps it had a famous previous owner, or maybe it presented a particularly difficult restoration?

Whatever the story. Please consider sharing it with your fellow members. If you feel that you may need help in writing an article there is plenty of assistance available – you only have to ask.

Editor

List of Tunes believed to be correctly identified

Composer	Work/ Opera Act	Tune First Produced
CYLINDER 1		
1. Henry Bishop – 1786-1855	Clari The Maid of Milan Home Sweet Home	1823 London
2. Claude Rouget De L'Isle – 1760-1836	La Marseillaise	April 1792
3. Philip Phile	Hail Columbia	1798 Philadelphia
4. Alexis Feodorovich von Lwoff – 1798-1870	Boske Tsariya Khrani (God Save and Protect the Czar.)	1833
5.	God Save the Queen	1745 England
6. Martin Luther – 1483-1546	Ein Feste Burg	Circa 1524
7. Joseph Haydn – 1732-1809	Gott Erhalte Franz Den Kaiser	1797 Austria
8. Carl Wilhelm – 1815-1873	Die Wacht Am Rhein	1854
CYLINDER 2		
1. Dance medley of two Scottish airs.		
2. Dance medley of two Scottish airs including Annie Laurie.		
3. Dance tune for The Campbells are Coming.		
4. Dance tune for My Love is like a Red Red Rose		
5. Scottish dance medley on three airs including Annie Laurie and the Blue Bells of Scotland.		
6. Jacques Offenbach – 1819-1880	Orphee aux Enfers Act 1 Finale	1858 Paris
7. Johann Strauss Jnr. – 1825-1899	Op 317 An der schonen blau Donau	1867
CYLINDER 3		
1. Friedrich Von Flotow – 1812-1883	Martha Act 2 Last Rose of Summer	1847 Vienna
2. Giuseppe Verdi – 1813-1901	Il Trovatore Act 4 Ah Che La Morte Ognora (Miserere)	1853 Rome
3. Gaetano Donizetti – 1797-1848	Don Pasquale Act 3 Com E Gentile	1843 Paris
4. Friedrich Von Flotow – 1812-1883	Martha Act 3 Ach So Fromm	1847 Vienna
5. Gaetano Donizetti – 1797-1848	Lucrezia Borgia Act 3 Il Segreto Per Esser Felici	1834 Milan
6. Jacques Offenbach – 1819-1880	Orphee Aux Enfers Act 2 Finale	1858 Paris
7. Charles Gounod – 1818-1893	Faust Act 3 Faites-lui Mes Aveux	1859 Paris

Old Extra Flanged Boss

Composer	Work/ Opera Act	Tune First Produced
CYLINDER 4		
1. Wolfgang Mozart – 1756-1791	Il Flauto Magico Act 1 La Dove Prende Amor Ricetto	1791 Vienna
2. Vincenzo Bellini – 1801-1835	Norma Act 4 In Mia Man Alfin Tu Sei	1831 Milan
3. Giacomo Meyerbeer – 1791-1864	Robert Le Diable Act 4 Robert Toi Quie Jaime	1831 Paris
4. Wolfgang Mozart – 1756-1791	Don Giovanni Act 1 La Ci Darem La Mano	1787 Prague
5. Gioacchino Rossini – 1792-1868	Guglielmo Tell Act 1 Andante Religioso (opening section of overture)	1829 Paris
6. Carl Maria Von Weber – 1786-1826	Der Freischutz Act2 Leise Leise Fromme Weise	1821 Berlin
7. –		
8. Daniel Auber – 1782-1871	Fra Diavolo Act 1 Er Blickt Auf Felsenhohn	1830 Paris
CYLINDER 5		
1. Felix Mendelssohn – 1809-1847	Op 63 No. 1 (six part songs) Ich Wollt Mein Lieb Ergrosse Sich (I would that my love)	1844
2. –		
3. –		
4. –		
5. –		
6. Frederick Crouch – 1808-1896	Kathleen Mavourneen.	1840 England
7. Michael Balfe – 1808-1870	The Bohemian Girl Act 2 I Dreamt that I Dwelt in Marble Halls	1843 London
8. Ferdinand Gumbert – 1818-1896	O Bitt Euch Leib Vogelin (I pray you dear little birds)	–
CYLINDER 6		
1. –		
2. Giuseppe Verdi – 1813-1901	Ernani Act 3 O Carlo Quinto Sia Glorea	1844 Venice
3. Friedrich Von Flotow – 1812-1883	Martha Act 3 Ach Kann Der Himmel Vergeben	1847 Vienna
4. –		
5. Giuseppe Verdi – 1813-1901	Rigoletto Act 1 Questa O Quella Per Mi Pari Sono	1851 Venice
6. –		
7. –		
8. Giuseppe Verdi – 1813-1901	La Traviata Act 1 - Libiamo Libiamo Ne Liete Calici (Brindisi)	1853 Venice

Piano Melodico

A family of mechanical music instruments

by C. F. C. Greinacher, Germany



Fig. 1. Piano Melodico with 48 notes.

What is it?

The Piano Melodico is a string instrument, specifically designed for indoor use. The strings are played with felt hammers which are controlled by a tricky mechanical arrangement of wheels, shafts, springs and hammers, normally driven by a crank. The "memory" is a punched cardboard book similar to many other mechanical music instruments of the period.

The Piano Melodico is not a piano with a mechanical or pneumatic add-on to make it self-playing but it is a totally specific construction of the late 19th century to bring the popular music of that time - especially melodies from the famous operas of Verdi, Puccini and others - into the drawing rooms of well-heeled families.

Where does it come from?

The Italian instrument maker Giovanni Racca, whose workshop was located in the Via Milazzo 18, Bologna, Italy, designed the Piano Melodico in the 1880s and sold them until about the First World War. Giovanni Racca built his Piano Melodici in two sizes, 4 and 6 octaves, in different case designs. Two of these original Giovanni Racca instruments are shown in fig. 1 and 2.

Soon after Giovanni Racca offered his instruments to the market, he contracted a licence agreement with the German firm

Wilhelm Späthe of Gera. Späthe built a smaller 30 note (3 octave) version of the Piano Melodico. Marketing started in 1889 under the name Pianophon (fig. 4). In 1890

Späthe sold a model driven by a spring wound motor. This instrument could play for 12 minutes without rewinding the spring (E). One of these smaller instruments is shown in fig. 3. Several other models were offered by different dealers throughout Europe, as one can find in dealers' catalogs from the turn of the century (C), (D) (figures 4 - 6). At the Leipzig Fair in 1891 the Pianophon was the "hit of the year". Mr. Späthe, together with Mr. Hlawatsch, had improved some of the mechanical details. Mr. Hlawatsch, living in Russia, was the inventor of another mechanical music instrument with vibrating hammers (F).



Fig. 2. Piano Melodico with 73 notes.



Fig. 3. Piano Melodico with 30 notes.



Fig. 4. Piano Melodico, same model as shown in fig. 3.

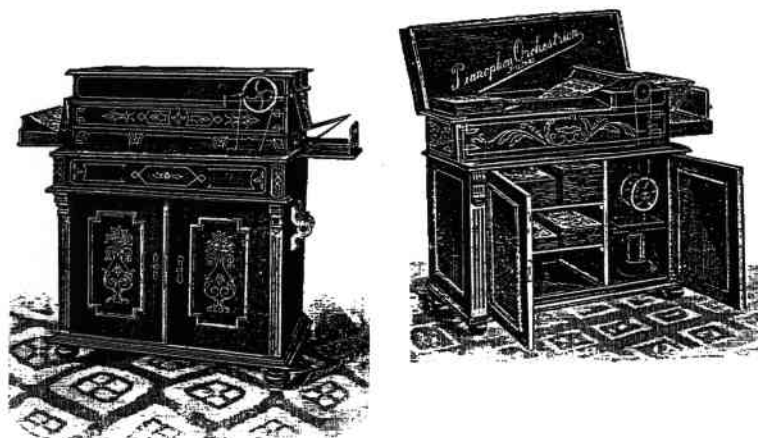


Fig. 5. Piano Melodico, 30 notes, with hot-air-motor.

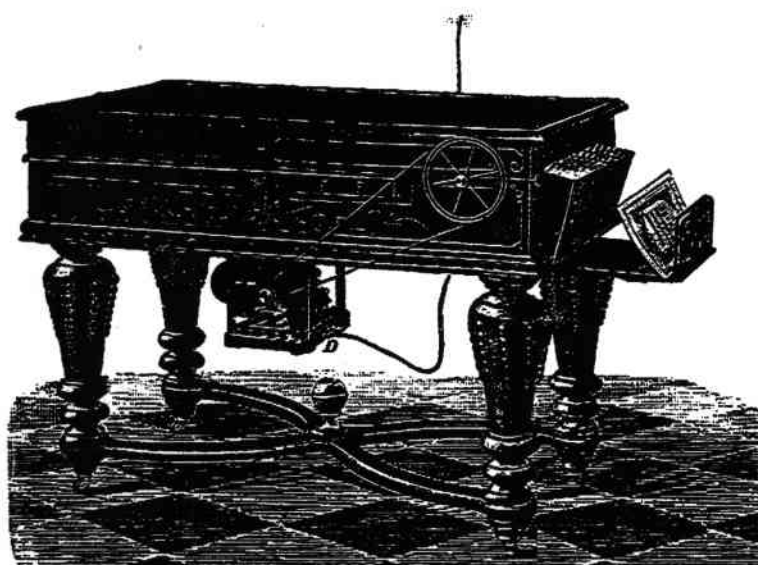


Fig. 6. Piano Melodico, 30 notes, with electric motor drive.

Even great music connoisseurs and experts are delighted with the instrument and its tones and wonder about the richness and fullness of the instrument.

How does it sound?

The basic sound is very similar to a piano. But because the hammers are driven continuously, they repeatedly will strike the strings as long as a single note lasts. If a short note is played, there is one strike and this sounds like a piano, a long-lasting note produces repeated strikes and this sounds similar to a mandolin. Depending on the skills of the arranger of the music book, this effect can make the Piano

Melodico sound like an orchestra with many different instruments.

In an advertisement from 1901 the sound of the Piano Melodico is described as follows:

"The sound of the Piano Melodico is produced by the percussion of steel strings which are strung on an iron frame as substantial as any piano has. The patent mechanism for sustaining the tone by continuous percussion gives the instrument a peculiar and



Fig. 7. Piano Melodico, similar model as in fig. 5 and 6. During restoration the instrument was altered to manual drive.

wonderful tone sounding in the high range like the mandolin, in the middle range like the French horn, and in the lower range like the piano. The ensemble effect is splendid and this is enhanced through the ability to produce pianissimo with trills, crescendo and forte at will during the performance, thus conforming with the requirements of the original composition. Even great music connoisseurs and experts are delighted with the instrument and its tones and wonder about the richness and fullness of the instrument."

The best music arrangements for the Piano Melodico are on the original Giovanni Racca music books (fig. 9).

The music books for the 30, 48 and 73 note Piano Melodici measure 272, 309 and 462 mm in width respectively.

A beautifully painted Piano Melodico is in the famous museum in Rudesheim. This instrument is shown in fig. 8.

The mechanical components of the Piano Melodico

The main mechanical components are similar for all the different models. These components (shown schematically in fig. 10) are:

- the CASE
- the DRIVE MODULE for the MUSIC BOOK transport and for the HAMMERS
- the TRACKER BAR
- the STRINGFRAME with STRINGS
- the SOUNDBOARD

In the following, I am going to describe these components.



Fig. 8. Beautifully painted Piano Melodico with 30 notes. Museum Ruedesheim.



Fig. 9. Original Giovanni Racca Music Book for 48 notes PM.



The Case

The CASE of the 73 note Piano Melodico looks like a small Grand Piano and stands on three legs (fig.2 and 11). It measures approximately 138 by 83 cm and is 80 cm high. The weight is approximately 80 kg.

The 48 note model is slightly smaller: 110 by 60 by 25 cm and it stands on four small feet (fig. 1)

The 30 note model is the smallest one: 87 by 45 by 25 cm without the long legs. Standing on the long legs as in fig.3 this model is 82 cm high.

The cases are normally painted in black (more seldom in brown) with gold decoration on them and the signature Piano Melodico Patent is written in gold letters (fig. 12)

The Grand looks more elegant; mostly with a shiny black polished finish. Some instruments are made from valuable woods to match the interior of the living rooms of the end of the 19th century (fig. 11).

The Drive Module

The Drive Module in a 73 note PM (fig. 13) is nearly the same as in a 48 note PM. The hand cranked MAIN WHEEL (1) of 150 mm diameter has a rubber ring which engages with the arbor (3) (17 mm diameter) of the second wheel, the FLY WHEEL (2). On the same arbor an eccentric (4) is fixed which is driving the HAMMERS via a

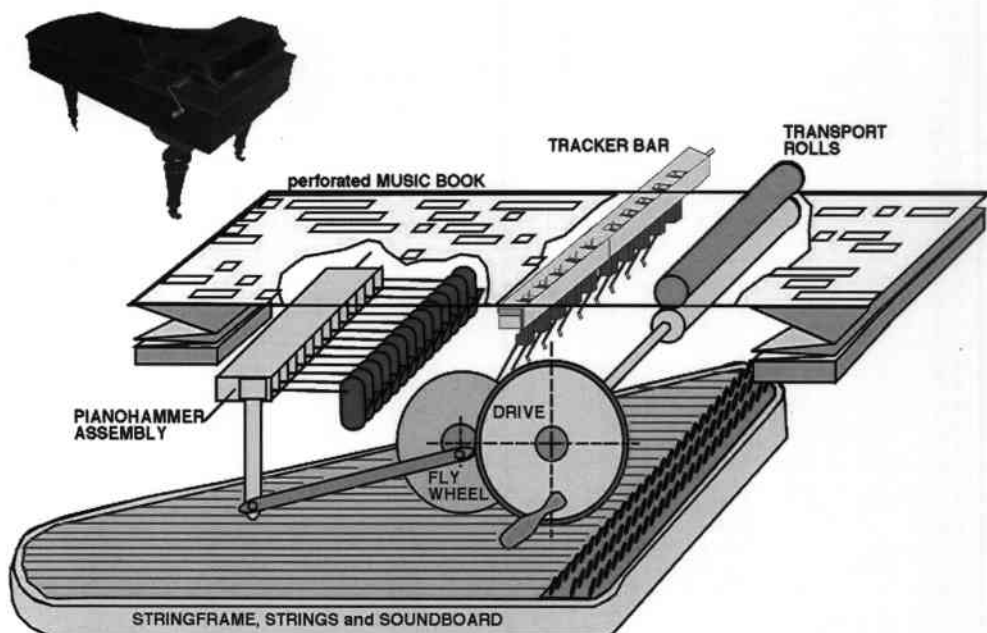


Fig. 10. Components of a Piano Melodico.

Piano Melodico

Fig. 11. 73 notes Piano Melodico.

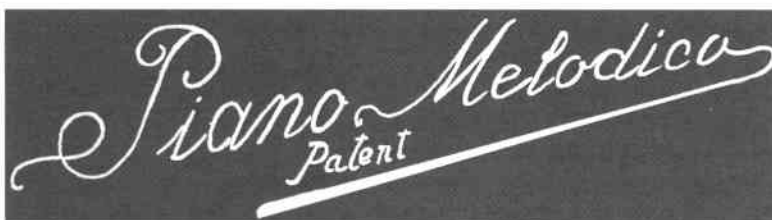


Fig. 12. Signature of a 30 notes PM.

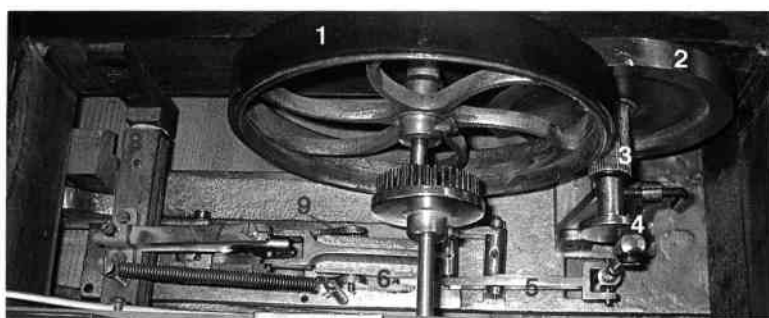


Fig. 13. Drive Module of a 73 notes PM.



Fig. 14. Hammers, Hammer Springs and Stop and Go Springs of a 48 notes PM.

connecting rod (4) and a simple but most tricky mechanical assembly which I will explain later on.

The MAIN WHEEL engages with the primary TRANSPORT ROLL (see fig. 13) via two gears. The gear ratio is 3.5:1. Turning the MAIN WHEEL at about one turn per second, the TRANSPORT ROLL will turn at 0.28 turns per second. The diameter of the TRANSPORT ROLL is 33 mm, i.e. the speed of the MUSIC BOOK is about 30 mm per second.

When turning the MAIN WHEEL at one turn per second, the FLY WHEEL and the eccentric will run at 8.8 turns per second and via the CONNECTING ROD the PIANO HAMMER ASSEMBLY oscillates with a frequency of 8.8 Hertz.

In the 30 note Piano Melodico the construction of the drive module is different. Here the DRIVE MODULE consists of the hand cranked main wheel of 88 mm diameter. The rubber ring of this main wheel engages with the arbor (6.5 mm diameter) of the second wheel, the FLY WHEEL. On the same arbor an eccentric is fixed which is driving the hammers via a connecting rod and a simple but most tricky mechanical assembly which I will explain later.

The MAIN WHEEL engages directly with the primary TRANSPORT ROLL. Turning the MAIN WHEEL at about one turn per second, the TRANSPORT ROLL will turn at 1 turn per second too. As the diameter of the TRANSPORT ROLL is 9 mm, i.e. the speed of the MUSIC BOOK is about 30 mm per second.

When turning the MAIN WHEEL at one turn per second, the FLY WHEEL and the eccentric will run at about 10 turns per second. Via the CONNECTING ROD the PIANO HAMMER ASSEMBLY oscillates with a frequency of about 10 Hertz.

When restoring the HAMMER ASSEMBLY (Fig. 14), especially the HAMMER SPRINGS, it is important to know the frequency of oscillation of the HAMMER ASSEMBLY. The HAMMER SPRINGS have to be designed so that their RESONANCE FREQUENCY is high enough

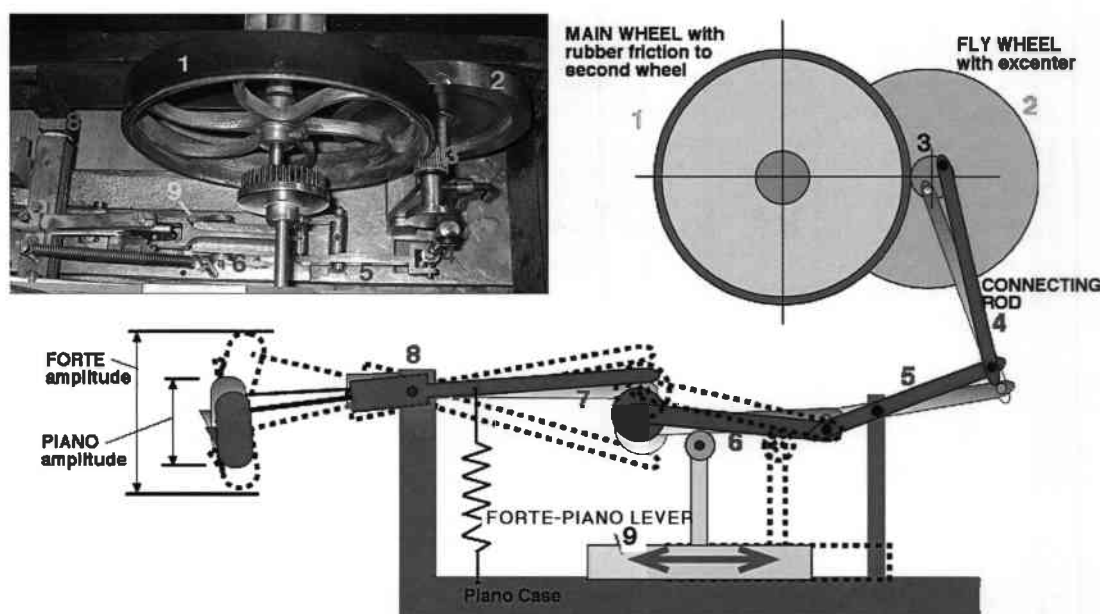


Fig. 15. Drive Module of the 48 and 73 notes Piano Melodici.

compared with the frequency of oscillation of the HAMMER ASSEMBLY. The measured RESONANCE FREQUENCY of the hammers of my Piano Melodico with 73 notes is a little more than 16 Hertz. i.e. there is a factor of two between RESONANCE FREQUENCY and oscillation frequency of the hammers.

When I restored the Piano Melodico with 30 notes, shown in fig. 21 and 22, I ran into severe problems. As one can see from the picture, this instrument really was a wreck when I found it in the loft in a house of an old man. There he had two of these instruments, slightly different from each other but both in very bad condition. No hammers, no hammer springs, only parts of the gears. He offered to give me either one of these two instruments provided I would restore them and give him back one in playing condition. I met the challenge and restored both instruments.

I restored the first one, just by looking at other similar instruments in museums and in pictures. Some measurements I could take from the remains of the two wrecks. The hammers and hammer springs for the first instrument I designed just geometrically but I did not consider the resonance frequency of the hammer/spring unit. After more than 100 hours of working on this instrument I started it for a first test run. It sounded quite good and

the melody played clearly. But when I altered the speed of turning the crank slightly, all of a sudden it made a terrible noise. Shocked by this noise I subconsciously reduced the speed of cranking and the noise decreased immediately. It took me a lot of time to find out what had happened: the resonance frequency of the hammer/spring unit was exactly in the same range as the oscillation frequency forced by the speed of turning the crank. When the hammers came into resonance, their oscillation amplitude increased and the loudness of the instrument increased tremendously. In other words, the sound of the instrument was totally unstable.

To solve the problem I had to cut a new set of hammer springs, about twice the thickness of the first set. That doubled the resonance frequency and the problem was solved.

Now I am going to explain how the DRIVE MODULE makes the HAMMERS oscillate. Concentrate on fig 15 with the following text:

Turning the MAIN WHEEL (1) at one turn per second makes the FLY WHEEL spin around at about 8.8 turns per second. The CONNECTING ROD (4) translates this movement via the lever (5) to the lever (6). The small wheel at the left end of lever (6) moves up and down at 8.8 Hertz. The right-hand end (7) of the hammer assembly is pressed down onto this

small wheel by a spring. So the up and down movement of the small wheel is converted to a corresponding up and down of the hammer head. The amplitude of the hammer head movement depends on the geometrical ratios of the different lever-arms. The really clever solution introduced by Giovanni Racca is the FORTE-PIANO LEVER (9). Moving this FORTE-PIANO LEVER as indicated by the double arrow, allows the player to alter the ratio of the lever-arm (6) continuously. Moving the lever (9) to the left, the amplitude of the small wheel on lever (6) is small, moving the lever (9) to the right, the amplitude of the small wheel increases. As a result the HAMMER HEAD amplitude is minimal when the FORTE-PIANO LEVER is at the very left position and the instrument plays PIANO. Shifting the FORTE-PIANO LEVER to the very right position, the HAMMER HEAD amplitude reaches its maximum and the instrument plays FORTE.

This ingenious forte-piano mechanism is built into the original Giovanni Racca PIANO MELODICI, i.e. those instruments with 48 or 73 notes. The smaller 30 note models made under licence from Leipzig do not have this forte-piano mechanism. For marketing reasons they have a small lever, labelled FORTE-PIANO. But this

Shocked by this noise I subconsciously reduced the speed of cranking and the noise decreased immediately.

lever works very poorly; moving it to the piano-position puts a very weak felt onto the hammer-springs. Some fraction of the oscillation energy gets absorbed, they are damped, and this reduces their oscillation amplitude. This really simple solution works in principle but it is hard to achieve a continuous transition from forte to piano and vice versa.

The Tracker Bar

The Tracker Bar is the most delicate component of the Piano Melodico. It has to scan the perforated music book and controls the oscillation of the hammers. The principle of this control mechanism is shown in fig. 16

The perforated or punched music book moves over the TRACKER BAR. As long as there

is no hole in the paper, the paper presses against the steel pins on top of the claws, one claw for each note. This forces the claws to turn by a small degree and the catcher spring on the bottom of the claws engages with the nose of the related hammer. Despite the fact that the hammer's arbor is continuously oscillated by the lever-action of the drive module, the hammer heads are blocked from oscillating by the CATCHER spring. As soon as a hole in the paper comes over the appropriate claw, the steel pin falls through the hole, the claws turn up by a small angle, the CATCHER leaves from the hammer's nose and immediately the hammer head starts oscillating and strikes the string.

Fig. 17 shows a picture of the TRACKER BAR assembly of a 48 note Piano Melodico and a drawing of its construction. A much more detailed drawing is shown in fig. 18. The distance between the steel pins (the pitch) is the same for the 48 and 73 note Piano Melodici: it is 6.2 mm. For the 30 notes Piano Melodici the pitch is 8.8 mm. With the help of some adjustments to press down the unused claws and to feed the smaller music books of the 48 note Piano Melodici, it is possible to play music books of the 48 note Piano Melodici on a 73 note instrument. The lowest note then will be played as G# instead of G. One could accept this or tune the appropriate string half a note lower.

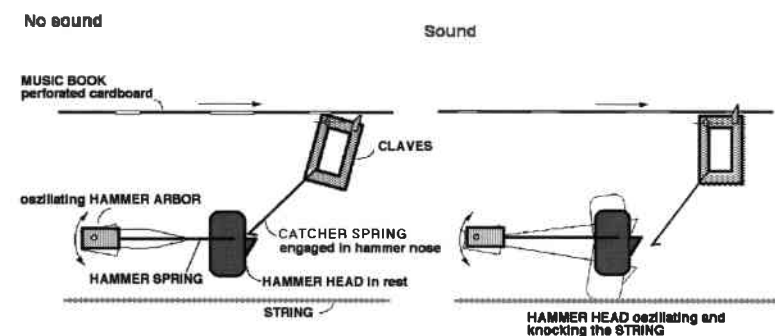


Fig. 16. Hammer Control Mechanism of the PIANO MELODICI.

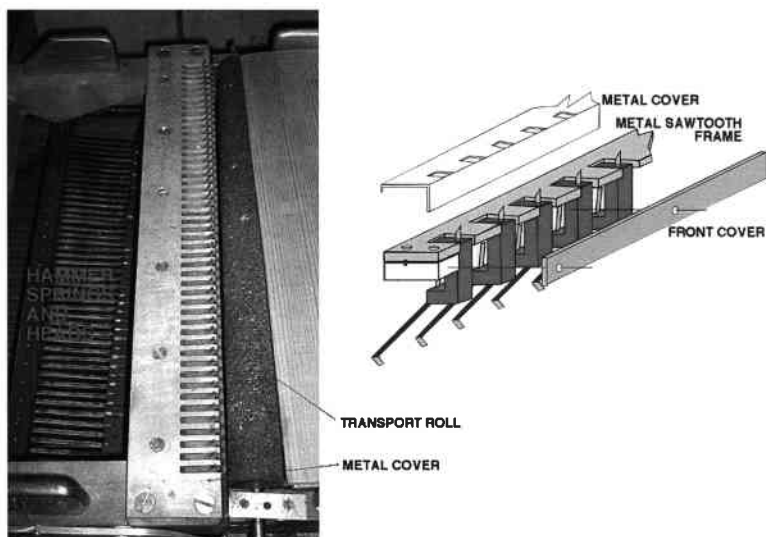


Fig. 17. TRACKER BAR ASSEMBLY.

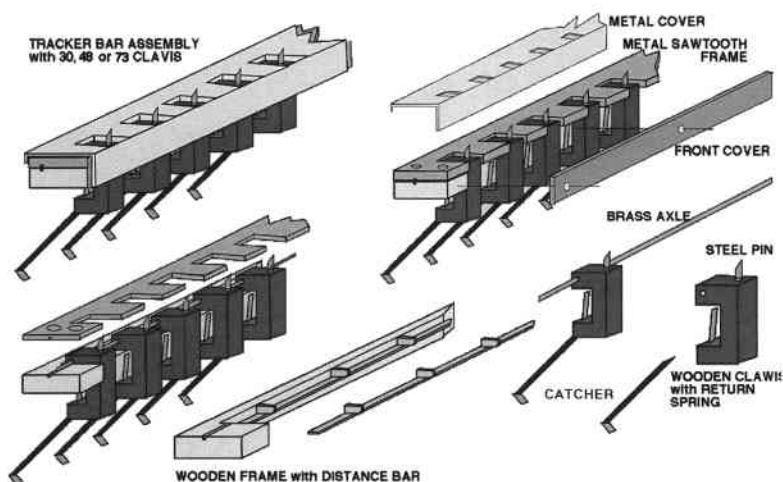


Fig. 18. TRACKER BAR ASSEMBLY and its COMPONENTS.



Fig. 19. STRINGFRAME, STRINGS and SOUNDBOARD of a 73 notes Piano Melodico.

String Frame, Strings and Soundboard

There are 18 single bass strings, ranging from G1 to C3. These are copper wound steel strings. The 55 descant and treble strings, ranging from C#3 to G7, are all two strings per note. So in total the 73 note Piano Melodico carries 128 strings.

Whereas the soundboard of a 30 note Piano Melodico has a much simpler construction, the soundboards of the larger Piano Melodici (48 and 73 notes) are very well designed and manufactured.

How much does it cost?

Browsing through catalogs one can see that the prices for the Piano Melodici were quite stable

between 1892 and 1901. Table 2 shows some figures for the well known models of Piano Melodici:

The prices in table 3 need some explanation: The list prices are given in Marks, the German currency of that time. In order to get some feeling which value these prices would represent, the Marks are compared to the amount of liters of beer you could get for the same money and how many days an average industry worker had to work to earn that money (B). This equivalent is given in EURO and in US \$.

It might be of interest for some of you to get some idea about the prices to be paid for a Piano Melodico showing up on the antiques market. In table 4

some prices are listed which were paid in Europe during the last few years. It is interesting to see that the antiques market prices of today for the small models (PM 30) are very close to today's equivalent of the list prices of 1900 (C), (D). You can get the top model, the Piano Melodico with 73 notes, for half the equivalent price of the price list of around 1900. Seen from this point of view, you can get a bargain when buying such a GRAND!

But if you want a 30-note Piano Melodico for a small price, you should look for an instrument in not very good condition. You might get it for less money (500 US \$?) and restore it.

Table 1: Scale and strings of the Piano Melodici. F = Bass String, steel, copper-wire wrapped. F = Deskant and treble string, steel, two strings per note

PM 73 String#	PM 73 Note	PM 48 String#	PM 48 Note	PM 30 String#	PM 30 Note	PM 73 String#	PM 73 Note	PM 48 String#	PM 48 Note	PM 30 String#	PM 30 Note
1	G1					37	G	24	G	16	G
2	G#					38	G#	25	G#	17	G#
3	A					39	A = 440 Hz	26	A = 440 Hz	18	A = 440 Hz
4	A#					40	A#	27	A#	19	A#
5	H					41	H	28	H	20	H
6	C2					42	C5	29	C5	21	C5
7	C#					43	C#	30	C#	22	C#
8	D					44	D	31	D	23	D
9	D#					45	D#	32	D#	24	D#
10	E					46	E	33	E	25	E
11	F					47	F	34	F	26	F
12	F#					48	F#	35	F#	27	F#
13	G					49	G	36	G	28	G
14	G#	1	G			50	G#	37	G#	29	G#
15	A	2	A	1	A	51	A	38	A	30	A
16	A#	3	A#			52	A#	39	A#		
17	H	4	H	2	H	53	H	40	H		
18	C3	5	C3			54	C6	41	C6		
19	C#	6	C#	3	C#	55	C#	42	C#		
20	D	7	D	4	D	56	D	43	D		
21	D#	8	D#			57	D#	44	D#		
22	E	9	E	5	E	58	E	45	E		
23	F	10	F			59	F	46	F		
24	F#	11	F#	6	F#	60	F#	47	F#		
25	G	12	G	7	G	61	G	48	G		
26	G#	13	G#	8	G#	62	G#				
27	A	14	A	9	A	63	A				
28	A#	15	A#			64	A#				
29	H	16	H	10	H	65	H				
30	C4	17	C4	11	C4	66	C7				
31	C#	18	C#	12	C#	67	C#				
32	D	19	D	13	D	68	D				
33	D#	20	D#			69	D#				
34	E	21	E	14	E	70	E				
35	F	22	F			71	F				
36	F#	23	F#	15	F#	72	F#				
						73	G				

Table 1 shows the main string data for the different PIANO MELODICO models.

Table 3: List prices of Piano Melodici around 1900 compared to today's values
 4) Catalog Holzweissig, 4) Catalog J. M. Bon, Leipzig.

	List Price Mark	equivalent liter beer 1900 0.22 Mk/L	equivalent working days 1900 5.60 Mk/day	equivalent EURO 2002 100 Euro/day	equivalent US \$ 2002 1Euro=0.88\$
1892/93 ³					
PM 30 hand cranked	82,-	370	15	1 500.-	1 320.-
PM 30 hand cr. with table	104,-	470	19	1 900.-	1 670.-
Music book per meter	0,80				
1897 ³					
PM 30, El.motor on desk	215,-	980	38	3 800.-	3 340.-
1898 ³					
PM 30 hand cranked	83,-	380	15	1 500.-	1 320.-
PM 30 hand cr. with table	103,-	470	18	1 800.-	1 580.-
PM 30 on desk, auto P/F	156,-	710	28	2 800.-	2 460.-
PM 30 with hot-air-motor	250,-	1140	45	2 800.-	2 460.-
PM 30 with electric motor	215,-	980	38	3 800.-	3 340.-
PM 30 el.motor + Accu	300,-	1360	53	5 300.-	4 660.-
Music book per meter	0,84				
1901 ³					
PM 30 hand cranked	86,75	390	15	1 500.-	1 320.-
PM 30 hand cr. with table	106,75	480	19	1 900.-	1 670.-
PM 30 on desk, auto P/F	164,50	750	29	2 900.-	2 550.-
PM 30 with hot-air-motor	267,-	1210	48	4 800.-	4 220.-
PM 30 with spring-motor	417,-	1900	74	7 400.-	6 510.-
1904 ⁴					
PM 73	800,-	3640	143	14 300.-	12 580.-
mean price for a hand cranked PM 30 with table around 1900	105,-	480	19	1 900.-	1 670.-

After about two hours I had two pasteboard boxes full with remainders of two Piano Melodici:...

Example of a difficult restoration

Some years ago I was looking to buy my first Piano Melodico but I would and could not spend too much money for it. During a collectors' meeting I met an old man and asked my standard question: "Do you know somebody who would sell a Piano Melodico for little money?" I was very much surprised hearing his answer: "Yes, I have two Piano Melodici lying around somewhere at home. They are in rather poor condition. If you will restore them and give one back to me, you could take the other one for yourself and you don't have to pay me anything."

I was so happy! Some weeks later I went by car 300 km and visited him. We climbed up into his loft and we had to look for quite a while. After about two hours I had two pasteboard boxes full with remainders of two Piano Melodici: broken wood, indefinable pieces of felt, steel and brass, remainders of strings, three out of four legs, broken parts of hammers and some

indefinable pieces.

The owner asked me to take it all with me and to give him back either one of the two instruments in playing condition, "if possible not later than in about 14 months from today". The reason for this date was an organ rally where he wanted to play his instrument.

Back home, first I took some pictures of what I brought with me. Fig.21 and 22 shows one of the instruments.

On January 22nd, 2000, I started the restoration of these instruments. The first one was finished after some 143 hours working on it, on November 14th.

Table 4: Prices of Piano Melodici on the European market of today.

	Prices paid Euro	Prices paid US \$ 1 Euro = 0,88 \$	list price around 1900 in today's equivalent US \$
PM 30, private sale 2001	1,530.-	1,350.-	1,670.-
PM 48, private sale 2000	2,560.-	2,250.-	
PM 48, auction 2000	2,560.-	2,250.-	
PM 73, auction 1998	6,650.-	5,900.-	12 580.-
PM 73, private sale 1999	6,900.-	6,100.-	12 580.-
PM 73, private sale 2001	5,110.-	4,500.-	12 580.-
Music Book PM 30, recut,			
list price per meter (Le Ludion)	9.-	7.90	13.-
Music Book PM 48, recut,			
list price per meter (Le Ludion)	11.-	9.70	
Music Book PM 48, original, prices paid per meter	10.- to 20.-	9.- to 18.-	



Fig. 21. 30 notes Piano Melodico as I found it on the loft of an old man.



Fig. 22. Same instrument as in Fig. 21.

Adding some time for writing the restoration report - which is a

very important part of the restoration - the total amount of working time needed to restore this instrument was 150 hours.

The Restoration Report

In my opinion it's a must to write a Restoration Report. It is a document belonging to the restored instrument.

The Restoration Report is part of the Curriculum Vitae of the Instrument.

The Restoration Report for the instrument described before and shown in figs. 21 to 24 covers 18 pages. It lists each step of the work done in detail, the time needed, drawings and measurements. It describes special problems coming up during the restoration process and how they were solved. The report tells clearly which parts have been replaced and why this was done. ■

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- E. Zeitschrift für Instrumentenbau, Jahrg.10, 1. April 1890, p.230
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Reading this article, one realises the tremendous effort that Christian Greinacher has put into the restoration of these two Piano Melodici.

But having read this, I wanted to know more about the actual restoration. The Restoration Report referred to takes up 18 pages so it must be very comprehensive, and I have prevailed upon Dr. Greinacher to write a follow-up article.

His present commitments mean that this cannot be prepared until much later this year, so we will have to wait until some time in 2004 to read what I am sure will be another fascinating article.

Editor

...the total amount of working time needed to restore this instrument was 150 hours.



Fig. 23. Same instrument as in Fig. 21, after restoration.



Fig. 24. The second instrument found on the loft after 120 hours of restoration work done.



Fig. 1. Tune sheet with Nicole's London "Framed globe" trade mark on Serial 50053 - entered as the G. No. - which is not so odd when you compare that G with the S for Schottische just above it.

Nicole in London.

Nicole's well-known tune sheet, with their globe trade mark at top centre, used after they moved to London in October 1881, is shown in Fig. 1.

The three numbers below the tune list, labelled L, G, and S, are intended to record the London, Gamme and Serial numbers. They often got entered in the wrong order. In Fig. 1, which belongs to serial 50053 with Gamme 5226, these two are transposed. The London number is the stock number in the London Office and is often seen quoted in late Nicole catalogues and sales lists. It is no guide for dating.

Serial 50053 is stamped on a slightly smoothed area of the cast iron bedplate, Fig. 2, and on the comb base beside the gamme number 5226, Fig. 3. The gamme number is also scribed on the bass lead, and on the bass end cylinder cap where it accompanies two attempts at stamping 50053 (one successful) and 27 from the serial number, Fig. 4. The "made by Nicole" slant is backed up by the NF monogram stamped on the governor cock, Fig. 5.

As with most Nicole boxes in the 50,000 series, however, closer examination shows that they were

not made by Nicole. Here, the maker's serial number is 627, as shown in Fig. 6. The only blank number is 3 on the cylinder assembly and on the bass edge of the bedplate, but it was common practice to identify some components using the last two or three digits of the serial number. Here, 27 of the serial number is seen in Fig. 4, and Fig. 7 shows the great wheel where it appears again with 053, part of the later serial number. The great wheel also has a stamped letter V, so far unexplained; and it has been boldly stamped with the maker's serial 627. That has suffered gouging from the stop arm pin being dragged round by the governor failing to stop at tune end due to a loose stop tail. So quite a bit of the box history is disclosed in Fig. 7.

The box has a very modest 4 1/4" (12cm) cylinder, but playing only four airs allows a comb of 68 teeth which can, and does here, give a very satisfying performance. I have always liked the *Estudiantina* waltz, composed in 1883, and could find no fault with its presentation. The box was probably made in 1883, in Geneva I think because the cylinder dots and track lines are on tune 4, and Nicole must have sought help in

Geneva before making arrangements with Paillard. It has one unusual feature - the back of the comb has a polished nickel-plated cover held in place by the comb screws. It conceals the name stamped on the comb in large capitals... NICOLE FRERES.

Nicole in the 1830s.

Nicole, a leading and inventive Company from their foundation in 1815, kept their name firmly in view. Their output of tabatieres, better referred to as petites musiques which became their standard description in Geneva and Ste. Croix, included 4-air types with 2 3/4" (7cm) cylinders and 37 comb teeth. Some came in close-fitting iron cases with orange finish and romantic transfer decoration.



Fig. 2. Treble end of bedplate, serial 50053 stamped between the cylinder bearing and the slots for the tune change lever.

I have always liked the Estudiantina waltz, composed in 1883, and could find no fault with its presentation.

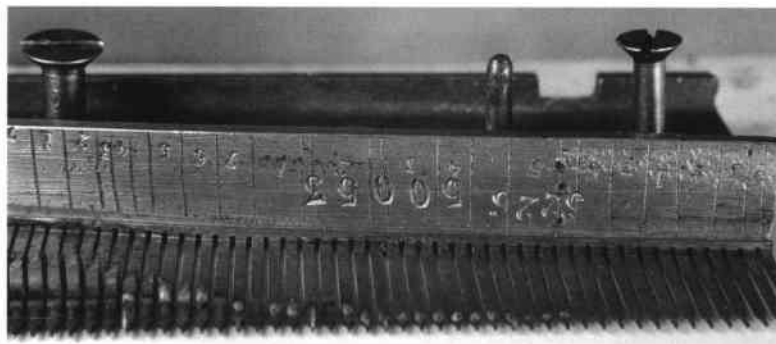


Fig. 3. Comb base with gamme and serial numbers, pitch changes marked and all numbered except semitones.

I think serial 13432 is a typical example, probably made in 1833, with the name stamped on bedplate and comb as shown in Fig. 8. Stamped underneath the bedplate is that rare small mark, T.F/o - see Fig. 9. It appeared in Oddments 68, Vol 17 no. 5 and has been reported on Nicole and Lecoultré boxes in the period 1833 - 1838. I think it is a repairer's stamp. This is its first reported appearance on a tabatière.

A rare Sublime Harmonie from Nicole

Every now and then another Nicole box turns up with a serial number over 50,000 but obviously made by the old firm. Serial 50751 is stamped on its cast iron bedplate beside the tune change lever. The gamme number is 3211 which they first used about 1875 when serial numbers were about 47,000. It has a double spring motor and conventional control levers as can be seen in Fig. 10.

The two 64-tooth combs have the old NICOLE FRERES stamp in small capitals, and they play six airs on a 13½" (34cm) cylinder. The tune sheet is the same as no. 109 in the book, which fits the 1875 date. So the box only got completed in London after 1881, well into the 50,000 serial numbers.

Its performance is well up to the highest sublime harmonie standards and of course it includes loud and soft passages. They are distinctly more effective than in the forte piano boxes to which Nicole were addicted for so long.

Double Trouble

What could have caused this ludicrous double stamping of the comb on Nicole serial 44839 in 1870? Fig. 11 shows it decorating a good six air movement with 11" cylinder and over a hundred comb teeth. I think the rogue stamp parallel with the comb teeth got on first, because the other N in the usual position has lost its bottom serif. Of course the two stampings are of equal length, but they don't look it - a fairly commonplace optical illusion.

Harpe Harmonique twins

The Harpe Harmonique box in Ted Brown's museum was described in Oddments 95. Then a visitor remarked that he had a very similar box with the same tunes. Further discussions disclosed that they had identical tune sheets (like no. 38) and tunes, and the same cases - burr walnut veneer all round and on domed lid, and with podium and feet. Their serial numbers were only 9 apart - 2175 in the museum and 2184 on the new discovery! So perhaps they were made in a batch?

Very unlikely, I think. What agent wants all alike when all rather different costs no more and provides that great sales asset, choice. Some identical boxes by Langdorff and Nicole have serial numbers separated by a year or more. So I thought it far more likely that an agent found the programme very effective and suggested an encore.

That was my opinion, but it was knocked out flat when I saw the two boxes side by side. They are completely different, except the cases! Serial 2175 has a 14"



Fig. 4. Cylinder bass end stamped with the original maker's serial number 627, the "6" now drilled away, and new serial added, with scribed gamme number.

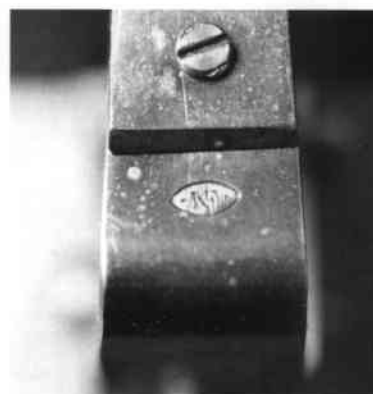


Fig. 5. Oval stamp 8mm wide on 50053 governor cock.



Fig. 6. Maker's serial 627 on governor and cylinder bearing.

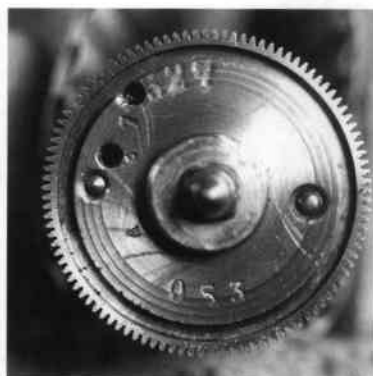


Fig. 7. Parts of both serial numbers on the great wheel with 627 heavily scored by the stop arm pin. The small capital V is not rare, but is not yet explained.

Its performance is well up to the highest sublime harmonie standards...

musical box oddments no. 98

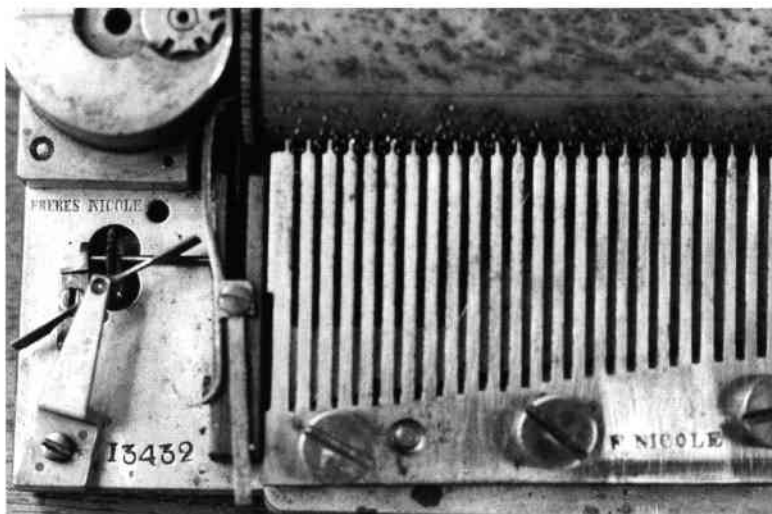


Fig. 8. Nicole 13432 with 2 3/4" (7cm) cylinder, 4 airs, 37 teeth.

cylinder with combs of 66 and 34 teeth. Serial 2184 has a 13" cylinder with 62 and 30 teeth

I think this was an example of a maker and his tune arranger realising that a cheaper version could prove almost equally appealing to a buyer. Reducing to a standard 13" (33cm) cylinder with smaller bedplate and case and losing only eight teeth could provide an almost equally attractive box at considerably reduced cost.

The two boxes are undoubtedly by the same maker,

and the same blank maker. The blank numbers are in the same pattern, - one number on bedplate edge for spring and governor, and another number for cylinder details. Serial 2175 has 92 and 20. Serial 2184, 33 and 69.

What is the verdict in year 2002 on these boxes made in 1875? The main combs differ by only four teeth and, sure enough, the main melody sounds equally good from both boxes. The accompaniments, with and without zither, are better on the larger box which benefits from its larger



Fig. 9. The rare T.F/o stamp seen under Nicole 13432.

sound board greater number of notes - particularly with the *Men of Harlech*.

The boxes were compared at the museum on August 18, 2002 during a Chanctonbury Ring meeting. They were voted to be very nearly equal in value. The smaller box scored with crisper playing. The larger box scored with better bass, specially on the noisier tunes! As for the zithers, it was conceded, by a distinctly anti-zither majority, that they picked out the accompaniments quite well but were just a pain in the neck.

What is the verdict in year 2002 on these boxes made in 1875?



Fig. 10. A really fine sublime harmonie made by Nicole as stated on their transfer at the back of the case... FABRICANTS à GENÈVE et à LONDRES. Photo by Patrick McCrossan.

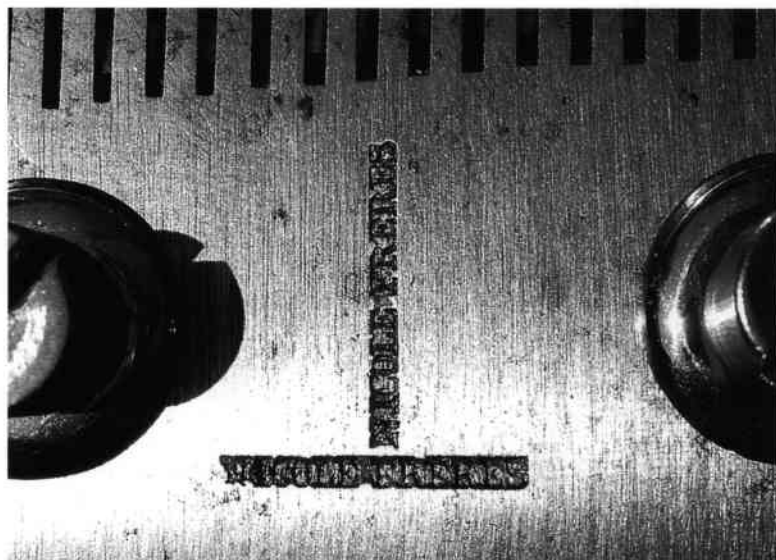


Fig. 11. Decoration on Nicole 44389.

Lecoultre Dating

The Lecoultre dating chart in my second book page 77 and improved as Chart 8 in the Tune Sheet Book can now be further improved as shown in Fig. 12.

I have added point P in 1865 to the line ABC. Control of the Company at that date switched to Charles F. Lecoultre and some boxes were stamped with his device, C L/GENEVE in a diamond frame.

Line Y is for Henri Joseph Lecoultre (1792-1854) who started up in Geneva in 1822. He was another inventive maker and worked in partnership with Granger from 1840 until 1844. In 1841 he married Aline Duperrut, but she died in 1851.

Several boxes by H. J. Lecoultre have recently been recognised, thanks to the early reports by Arthur Ord-Hume and recent discoveries by Robin Biggins, Patrick McCrossan and Tim Reed.

These boxes were all made after he changed his Company name, in 1841, to Joseph Lecoultre-Duperrut. Luckily one of them, serial 4826, has an important 1849 tune as its latest, so the box is sure to have been made in 1849 or 1850.

H. J. Lecoultre probably retired in 1852, aged 60, so I have extended the H. Lecoultre line to reach 5000 boxes in 1852. ■

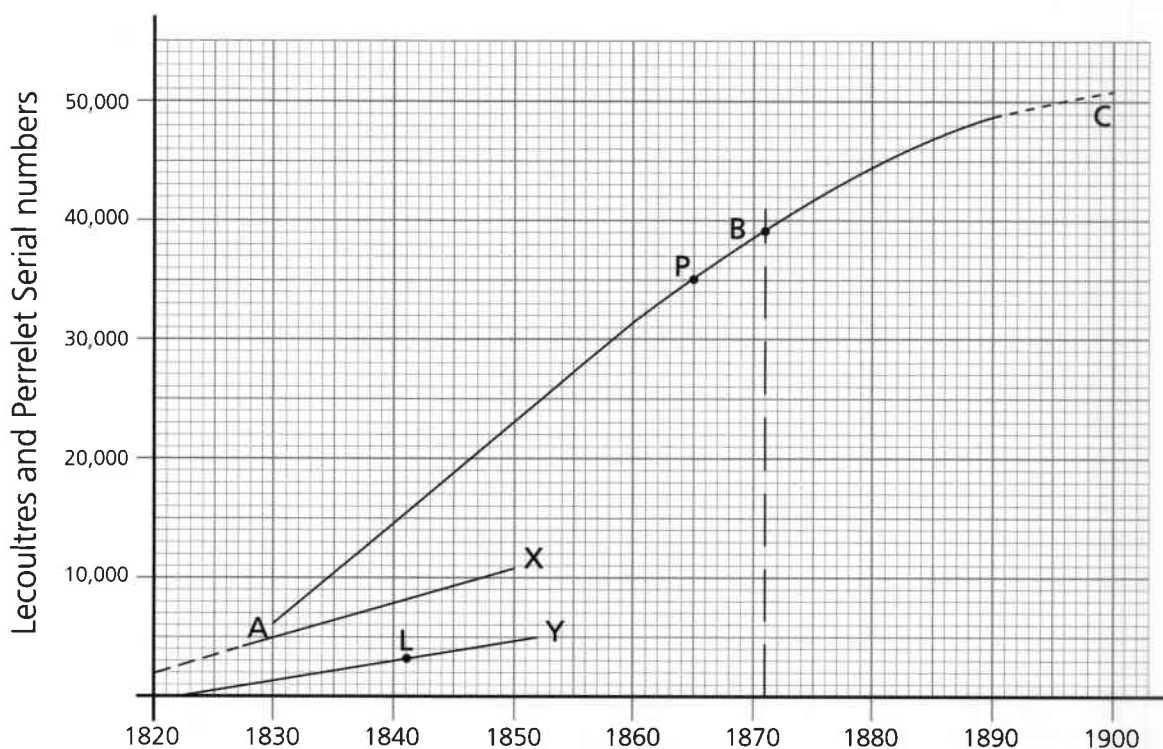


Fig. 12. Improvements made possible in 2002 to the Lecoultre Dating Chart on page 132 of the Tune Sheet Book published by the Society in 1999.

Line APBC covers the main Lecoultre output in Geneva. The final man-in-charge was C. F. Lecoultre who took charge at point P in 1865. He handed over the business to August Perrelet at point B in 1871.

Line X is for David Lecoultre at Le Brassus until 1850, when he joined the brothers and their serial numbers.

Line Y covers the inventive Henri Joseph Lecoultre in Geneva. Jean François Granger joined him as partner in 1840 but died in 1844. I have marked point L in 1841 when he changed the company name to Joseph Lecoultre-Duperrut. He probably retired in 1852 when his serial numbers possibly reached 5000.

The Lecoultres who made or factored musical boxes at Ste. Croix are not included due to a profound lack of data.

obituary

Tribute to Graham Whitehead

26th August, 1940 - 1st May, 2003

It was with great sadness we heard of the sudden death of Graham Whitehead, a most loyal friend and active member of the Society for many years.

On leaving school Graham's first introduction to working life was as trainee projectionist at the Gaumont Cinema, Coventry. The cinema had always held a great fascination for Graham and although his first duties were to scrub the small staircase to the projection room he was happy. On becoming proficient as a projectionist he was in demand and became employed also at the Regal Coventry and other cinemas in the area. During these early years Graham invested in a small movie camera and started to make his own films. He also, with his lifelong friend Doug Pell, created a travelling cinema and gave film shows in village halls and at children's birthday parties.

As a side line Graham experimented with printing in the garden shed and gained a commission from a friend. In 1963 from this small beginning Broadgate Printing was formed. This was to be Graham's main business until his retirement in 1998.

In 1966 on holiday in Switzerland Graham became fascinated with musical boxes and buying a small box started his collection.



Graham Whitehead - The Music Box Editor for more than twelve years.

In 1977 he joined the Society quickly becoming a member of the committee and Editor in 1986. It was at this time he introduced colour pictures and a new high standard was attained, the Journal becoming a beacon of success and much appreciated by members across the world. Over the next twelve years he published 49 Journals until his retirement in 1998.

Many will recall his conversion of a village chapel at Napton into a cinema complete with organ and mechanical musical instruments.

Then moving to Ashorne Hall to expand into a full concert hall with two cinema organs and projection facilities. The Society were always welcome to have their meetings in this wonderful setting and enjoy a steam train trip around the grounds, another of Graham's hobbies.

Graham will be greatly missed both by the Society and his many friends here and abroad who shared his passion for the cinema and mechanical music.

Our heartfelt sympathies go to his wife Janet, his son Andrew, daughter Alison and family. ■



Keith Harding

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The total number of boxes now registered is well over 6,700. Regrettably, some of you are still waiting to have your boxes registered. A reply will come, but it may be quite a time as I have just suffered a total system failure on the computer. Fortunately, backup copies of the Register had been made.

There has been a great increase in the number of registrations of Nicole boxes. My thanks to the dedicated and well known restorers of musical boxes for sending me so much valuable information. Just over 2,600 Nicoles are on the Register with many having details of their programme listed. Alongside this is the Nicole gamme number file. A total of 1,395 gamme numbers have been recorded. Of these 1,177 have full details of the tunes listed. There is now a sporting chance that, should you have a Nicole without a tune card and you can quote a gamme number, the tunes can be found.

I would like at this stage to make a serious appeal for help. A good response would assist in adding greatly to our knowledge of cylinder musical boxes in general and Nicole boxes in particular. Please do make an effort to respond without delay. Information is crucial to the development of a project that is being planned at this very moment!

Can anyone supply me with good clear photographs of the following?

- a) Early design Nicole tune cards.
- b) All types of metal tune cards as found on overture, grand format and oratorio boxes.
- c) Tune cards that have "bis" marked after the serial number.

Should you have a Nicole box with an original tune card and you feel that the box has not been recorded yet, please send in details. I have a number of members who are waiting for their "lost" gamme number to turn up.

There are now a significant number of cylinder boxes on the Register which appear never to have had a tune card fitted. There are no pin holes in the lid and the lid has not been re-polished and the holes filled in. There are now too many examples to be explained away as accidental omissions.

Theory 1

The boxes were sent out by the makers without a card so that an agent

could fit their own design of card. True in some cases, but this is more likely to happen towards the end of the manufacturing era.

Theory 2

Were the tunes so well known that it was not necessary to fit a tune card. I think not!

Theory 3

The box was originally dispatched with a loose card. This card has subsequently been lost. I cannot think of any convincing argument as to why a manufacturer should do this.

Theory 4

All these boxes were "special order" boxes and for some reason were sent out without cards. It is true that many, but not all, of these "card less" boxes do appear to be specials.

Theory 5

These boxes were sent out with miniature individual cards for each tune. These cards could be placed in

a holder behind the cylinder or passed around whilst each tune was being played.

I know that such things exist. Some forty years ago, I saw a Nicole in an antique shop in Dorset that had such a box. A miniature lyre shaped holder had been placed on the wooden filler behind the cylinder. Into this holder could be placed cards with the individual tunes written on them. These cards were about the size of visiting cards. In this case, not all of the cards had survived and I believe there was a "proper" tune card in place. Maybe this was a "one off" box. No other box using a similar system has been reported. Have any other members seen such a box?

Any views on these topics could usefully be aired in the Letters to the Editor section of the Journal. Please feel free to put forward your theories and thoughts on any or all of these topics. It would be interesting to read the theories of others as to how these unusual boxes came to market without cards. ■ **Arthur Cunliffe.**

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auction report



A musical mechanical picture (Bonhams).

Bonhams

Since our last issue, there have been four auctions of mechanical music which between them offered items from £5.00 to £10,000.

First off was Bonhams sale at Knowle, in the Midlands. Among the 68 lots, an Ami Rivenc 'bells-in-view' box made £1600, whilst at the other end of the scale a musical cigar dispenser went for £55. Two Style 45 15¼" Polyphons made £1,250 and £1,450 respectively, and a 19th century singing bird needing attention realised £2,100. There was lively interest in an 'O' roll-playing Nickelodeon which finally reached £3,900, whilst two upright 19½" Polyphons fetched £2,500 and £2,800.

Christie's

Just one month later Christie's opened their sale with a fine singing bird in silver-gilt and enamel box by F. Rochat which made a healthy £10,000. A similar box also by Rochat, but in a tortoiseshell case, made £7,500. The Kaufmann secretaire barrel organ, which was illustrated in the last issue of *The Music Box*, reached £10,000 although work was needed to get it into first-class playing condition.

A Mermod 'Station' musical box went for £4,500, whilst a pretty sublime harmony with chinoiserie case made £2,000.

Among the automata, a Renou acrobat, performing a handstand between two chairs, with original (disintegrating) gold satin costume realised £9,500.



A rare 27" Orchestral Regina (Bristol).

Society Auction

In June our own Society Auction, on the same day as the AGM, produced the usual wide range of items, including machine parts, novelties, books and several disc and cylinder musical boxes. Wielding the hammer, as usual, was Christopher Proudfoot and there was lively interest in most items.

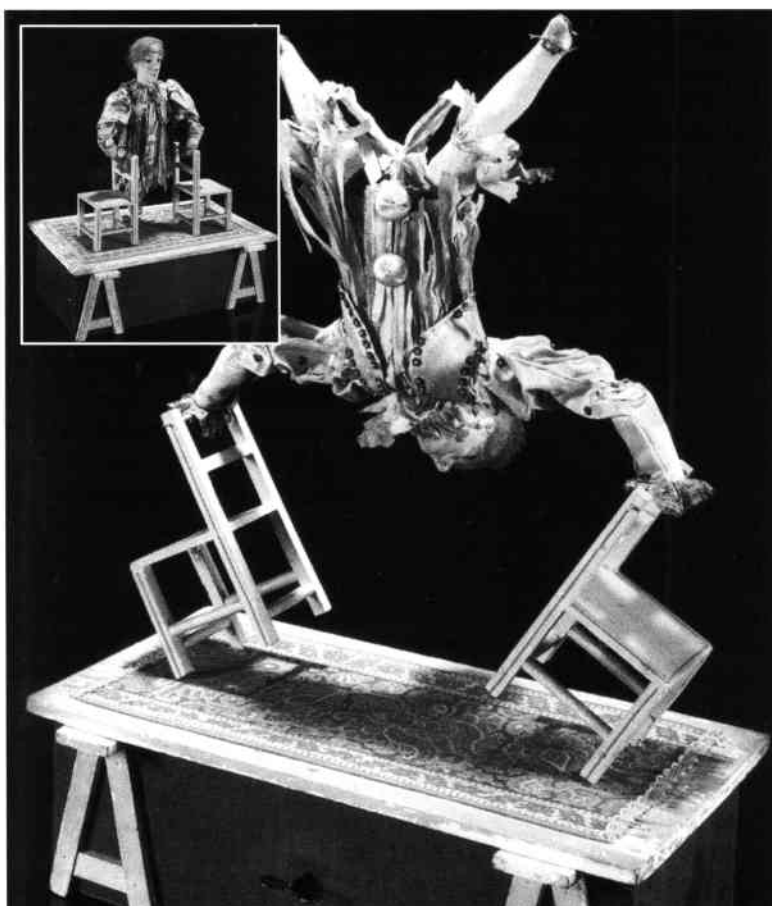
Bristol Auction Rooms

The final offerings were in Bristol, where Bristol Auction Rooms were selling the remaining items from the Roy Mickleburg collection – around 60 lots in all.

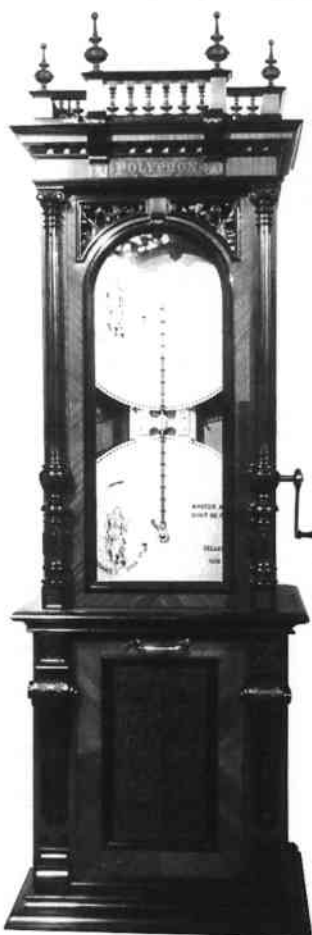
Top lot of the day was a fine

monkey orchestra automaton barrel organ which made £10,000. A rare 27" Regina disc box with folding lid realised £4,700, and a Erhlich 'Orpheus' piano playing 13" discs (of which there were 103) made £1,750, despite lacking its legs. Among the player pianos, a Rogers/Ampico in mahogany case made £4,000. The surprise of the day, however, was a Concert 20 note roller organ which was sold for £2,400. This must be a record price!

Our thanks for Frank Barnett of Bonhams, Nick Hawkins of Christie's and David Rees of Bristol Auction Rooms for their help in compiling this report. ■



A rare acrobat automaton by Renou (Christie's).



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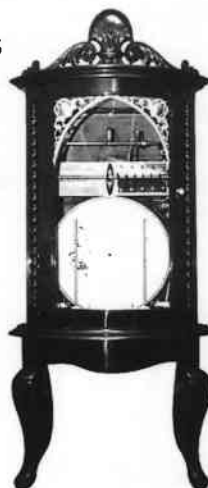
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Organette Book

To mark our 40th Anniversary

THE ORGANETTE BOOK a new publication from MBSGB

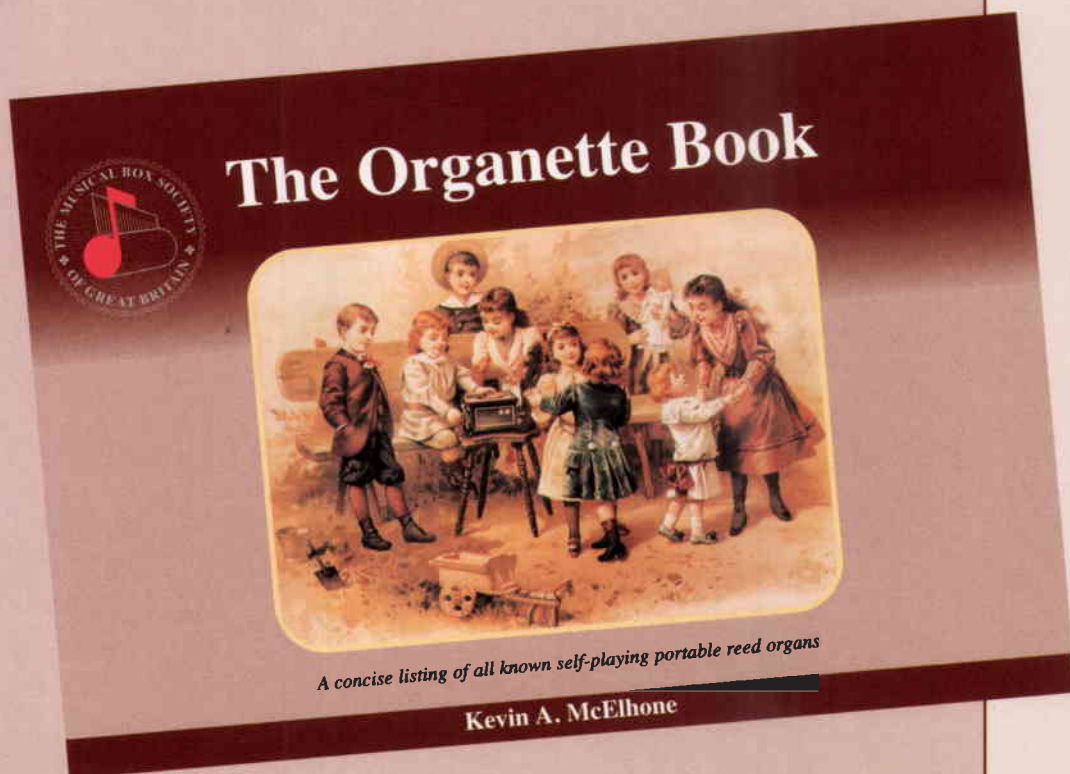
This limited edition of The Organette Book contains over 700 plates, many in colour, illustrating some 560 different makes, types and models of organette plus important historical adverts and documentation. Most of the illustrations were taken by author Kevin McElhone and have never been published in a definitive work such as this. The plates are supported by a comprehensive text, indexed A-Z for easy reference by either make, model or by name of owners and agents. The Organette Book is the story of the organette, defined as a small, hand-operated, portable reed instrument. The book is an historical account intended for anyone with an interest in all forms of mechanical

music as well as a reference work for novice, collector, expert, auction house or prospective purchaser. Instruments not quite fitting the definition are included rather than excluded.

It is possible that many of the illustrations have never been published in a work such as this. Much of the book's content has been derived from material contributed by collectors from around the world or from prime sources. Our technical editors and contributors revealed many instruments previously unrecorded in reference works on mechanical musical instruments.

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Payments to Todd Augsberger:

Check or Money Order in US dollars, credit card or electronic transfer via PayPal (www.paypal.com).

Note: Orders by non-members will be honoured in order of receipt of payment. Despatch will take place after August 1st 2002.

Dollar and Euro values should be those equivalent to the exchange rate of £GB existing at the time of payment.



Mechanical Music Auction

Knowle 2003

Entries are now being accepted for our forthcoming sale of Mechanical Music, Magic Lanterns, Optical Toys and Railwayana on Tuesday 21 October.

Illustrated: A Paillard Voucher et Fils bells in view musical box, with inset clock, serial no. 1834 playing eight airs. Estimate: £3,000 - 4,000.

For expert advice with a view to selling through Bonhams call Frank Barnett on 01564 776 151 or email frank.barnett@bonhams.com

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