

# MECHANICAL MUSIC WORLD Issue 4 SPRING 2016

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**Chairman's Message** from Ted Brown

It is a pity that so many musical toys end up in the bin due to internal damage, usually by being loved to death by their previous young. A large number will be beyond repair but some only appear to be. Those of us who have effected a decent repair on these toys should share their knowledge with others and we can help by writing about the problems in our Periodical.

I have made a start by detailing a repair effected on a Fisher-Price television for a young friend of ours. If we get enough articles on this practical side of the hobby, we hope to have a regular spot. Our Committee members will always help you with an article on this or any related you are involved with. Our next meeting will be our AGM and Organ Grind. Do not forget to give us your ideas on developing the Association for the future and remember that if you have not renewed your membership it will cease with no further reminders. We do not to lose members but will resist overspending on unnecessary postage. My thanks to our photo-artist in producing such fine quality covers. On the inside cover of issue 3 you found a reprint of Issue 2 featuring Richard Kerridge, our auditor. New I members may wish to have back copies if they are still available. As most of our production run of Periodicals are sold out with few copies remaining, please either contact me or Paul Bellamy about availability.

**Mechanical Music and the Musician**

The very vexed question of whether broadcasting constitutes a menace to the professional musician has been a subject of discussion ever since broadcasting was introduced, and the fight between societies of musicians and broadcasting is still an undecided battle in this country. In America, where broadcasting had a considerable start over our country, it had seemed that some sort of understanding between the musician and the broadcaster had been reached; but the arrival of the "talkies" and the great advances which have been made towards perfecting the gramophone record appear to have been watched with the greatest anxiety by professional musicians in the United States. Recently we have seen large advertising spaces in American newspapers taken by the American Federation of Musicians, with the object of trying to arrest the encroachment of mechanical music where it is feared the new art will oust the professional musician. Some of the arguments put forward by the American Federation of Musicians do not seem to us to ring true, as, for instance, a statement that "The cultural menace of this movement to supplant Real Music with the flat, savourless monotony of Mechanical Music becomes apparent upon a moment's thought." Is it not the generally accepted view that broadcasting resulted in a vast extension of the musical public and an enlarging of the appetite of the world for music of all kinds?

The extension of the use of what is described as mechanical music must, we fear, result in less employment amongst individual performing musicians, but may not this prove to be only a temporary objection and not one which is likely to have any lasting effect to the detriment of music (generally, nor to the disadvantage of the community, for surely the increased taste for music must stimulate the demand for creative musicians in every grade of the art. *From "The Wireless World and Radio Review" November 1929*

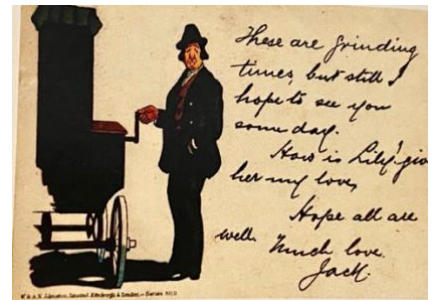
## Postcards from the Ted Brown collection



"Music by Handle (Handel) has been a musical joke for over 100 years

### AMBC Meeting 28<sup>th</sup> February 2016

"The first theme for the meeting was a DIY demonstration on how to make a marotte. The term is a word borrowed from the French where it has a much broader meaning such as a fad or a hobby. It may even refer to a wig stand! However, the word marotte is more specifically used for a musical toy that plays when rotated by hand. It is the latter that was the Musical purpose of the demonstration because a great deal of satisfaction can be had from creating a delightful musical toy using modern easily available materials and the musical manivelles (hand-wound musical movements).



The second theme was based on musical box makers Alliez & Berger and l'Épée (Fig.4). Fig4 is serial 8329, a 6-air key-wind movement circa 1854/5 This appears as tune sheet 74 in Bulleid's book Musical Box Tune Sheets. He wrote that this simple borders style appears with and without the AB. A notable feature is the way the lid pin interacts with the end-flap. Fig 4 is another simple borders style tune sheet for serial 10163.

### A 'Martinet et Benoit' Overture Cylinder Box by Chris Fynes

The rare stamp of 'Martinet et Benoit', when seen on a musical box comb, is usually synonymous with a movement of fine quality. The fact that little is known about this partnership is probably down to the small number of examples of their work to have surfaced. Last year Chris was fortunate to discover a Martinet & Benoit overture box serial no. 3725, which appeared to be only the third 'cartel' to come to light, joining numbers 3830 and 3948. Nevertheless, there are also about dozen or so miniature movements known to exist, with serial numbers ranging from 2181 to 4007. With the aid of detailed photographs Chris unravels the mystery of this box and its tunes .



### Saving our Albert

Ken tells his story of his restoration of a lone organ figure.



"Albert as he came to be named turned up about 55 years ago in a pile of fire salvaged timber a friend purchased to build a hen house. The figure was completely smoke blackened with blistered paintwork and missing both hands but with no sign amongst the pile of any parts of an organ on which I then presumed he may once have stood."

The friend having no interest in such strange things as organ figures, a deal was struck (one pint of best bitter as I recall) and looking much unloved he came to stand in my workshop for ages while I decided what to do. It was obvious that he could never be totally restored to original condition as missing hands and the fire damage was too severe.

Having noted details of the small amount of colour and decoration still visible in places I eventually set to work with paint remover and scraper and he was stripped back to the bare wood only then did I regret having not photographed him as in found condition. It was interesting to see as the paint was removed how he had been constructed but with no sign of

woodworm, as I understand is often the case in the softer wood these figures are carved. All joints were now visible but required loads of wood filler and various grades of sandpaper to restore the profile.

From the large cavity carved into his back, and some existing rusty linkage down the left arm it was clear that this hand was intended to be animated but with no sign of any form of motor to give it movement, so I now wondered if he could be a left-handed conductor or band master as he was in military style uniform.....

**Yesterday's Toys Tomorrow's Antiques (Part 2)** by Juliet Fynes with assistance from Ted Furcht  
Juliet's article examines Fisher-Price toys from the 1960's, 70's and 80's accompanied by photographs. She considers record players, cot toys and other musical box toys as well as their manufacture and finishes with a word of warning about Chinese copies.

Extract: "In 1971 Fisher-Price introduced the record player, designed by Ralph Crawford and Duke Spengler, which to all intents is a disc box (Fig 7). It was produced with minor variations until 1983, with either Swiss or Japanese musical movements. It had a red base and yellow turntable and needle arm, and a compartment to hold the 5 variously coloured records. The records were double-sided, thus giving ten tunes in all. The records have small protuberances in the grooves, which catch on star wheels in the pick-up head. These in turn pluck the teeth of the 22-note comb. The sound is conducted by a metal rod to a plastic cone in the body of the box, which amplifies the music. In the 1980's, similar models were made in green/yellow, yellow/red and blue/orange colourways.".....



#### **Restoration of a Singing Bird Box** by Chris Fynes

Chris tells us:- "My interest lies mainly in cylinder musical boxes, so I know very little about singing bird boxes. As they are so expensive, I decided to buy a cheap example in poor condition and fry my hand at restoration. This way, even if it all went wrong, I might at least have gained some experience. Having acquired a box at a maiden bid, closer examination showed me I was about to go on quite a steep learning curve. It's simple black homed panelled case was broken in places and badly stuck together but was redeemed with a nicely painted enamel lid of a cock fight, not very PC nowadays but historically interesting. The bird which had lost most of its feathers, predictably did not work and had its wing caught up in the grid. The tail spike was badly bent to one side where someone had forced the lid closed. When I tried to extricate the bird there was a squeak or two at a repeated pitch before it immediately got caught up again. This was basically to do with the start button not remaining open when activated. Cosmetically all the metal parts were badly corroded." .....

### **Fisher-Price Restoration by Ted Brown**

I was asked if I could fix a Fisher- Price toy television. It was playing very slowly. As the screen picture is driven from a musical movement, I knew where the problem was likely to be. The main difference with most of these children's toys is access to the inside. (After all, they are supposed to be child proof!) Modern Health & Safety Rules do not apply but nevertheless the maker made a pretty good job of making them impenetrable.



The T.V has what looks like dome-headed rivets holding the casing together. Luckily I had come across this form of fixing on an Amorette Organette with dancing dolls where iron nails were used. How to remove them is the problem. There were seven of these, three along the back and two at each end, driven through the plastic upper part into a hardwood base. Having been in place for 40 or so years, they do not make for easy removal.

I have found the following procedure fairly successful. Remember, although repair is necessary the toy should look as untouched as possible when it is re-assembled.

The nails are usually plated so rust on the shaft is not

the main problem in removing the nails but you need to get leverage under the nail-head. I use two old 5mm bladed, screw drivers, sharpened to a blunt knife edge. These can still go through your finger, so a good dodge is to cut the fingers off an old leather glove and slide it on the finger in the danger zone. Wedge the screwdriver blade under the nail head and use a cocktail stick or something stronger as a fulcrum. If possible, wedge another screwdriver similarly on the opposite side to lever the nail up from both sides. Hopefully, after two or three attempts the nail should start to lift out.

To pull them out I use a pair of clockmaker's hairspring cutters. They act like pincers but do not have a chamfer on the outside face and thus grip the shaft when almost flush with the plastic. With an impossibly stubborn one you may have to cut the head off .....

Ted continues to describe this painstaking work.

### **My first Key-Wind Musical Box by Ted Brown**

Ted explains in his article:- "About 30 years ago I managed to buy my first key-wind musical box, a Nicole Frères serial number 36261 factored by Cox Savory, Comhill, London in about 1858. In the 1970s and 1980s they commanded a price much higher than boxes. This was probably because no one had invented the web site and Ebay and all this other stuff that I refuse to get my head around. I was giving talks on mechanical music to Women's groups and Friendly Clubs and at one of these a gentleman offered to sell me a musical box. This had never happened before and I became very interested. It apparently looked very much like one of the boxes I had demonstrated but did not work very well. I went to his house and sitting on a coffee table was a 13-inch cylinder key-wind musical box. He set it going and it slowly built-up speed and started to play. It was obviously missing a large number of cylinder pins but worryingly it was vibrating noisily and moving along the length of the coffee table. I do not advocate my next action and it was probably more in reflex than anything else but I shoved my finger into the endless fan and stopped any further movement." .....

Ted continues the article in his own inimitable style.



### **The Phonograph – It will never catch on**

This extract from *"The Technical Educator (1877)"* begins:-

"Although Mr Edison has produced some marvels of science, it was by his phonograph that his name came first prominently before the English public. The first account of the machine was of a very startling character, and appeared in the columns of the *Scientific American*, and was afterwards copied into the newspapers throughout the world. The words ran thus:- "Mr Thomas A Edison recently came into this office, placed a little machine onto our desk, turned a crank, and the machine inquired as to our health, asked how we liked the phonograph, informed us that it was well, and bade us a cordial goodnight. These remarks were not only perfectly audible to ourselves, but to a dozen or more persons gathered around, and they were produced by the aid of no other mechanism than the simple little contrivance below."

