

MMW issue 7

Chairman's Report

"The start of another year and I wish you all well. We had a get-together in October for those who wanted to meet our Editors, David and Lesley Evans, who had travelled over from Vancouver Island, Canada. Their uncle, the late John Mansfield, was the founder of the Chanctonbury Ring group. He named it after an ancient hill feature that could be seen from his house. The format of the meeting consisted of at least one main theme such as a type of organette, a composer, or any one of a number of topics for education, information and entertainment.

About 25 of us gathered to make a day of entertainment with Roger Booty showing and playing a restored rare self Maxfield 14-note organette. Bemie Brown showed us how my Model V Orchestrelle *should* be played. An organist, he demonstrated the expressive capability of these fine manual and roll-playing instruments, from the softest piano to the loudest forte, from the slowest tempo to the quickest passages, a virtuoso performance. I have learned two more effective stop combinations that I hadn't previously tried."

Meetings Report

Don Busby gave a talk and demonstration of his experience of making a musical box. It was a fascinating journey both for him and his audience who marvelled at his ingenuity. He demonstrated a rig that allowed him to crank the cylinder by hand as it played the comb. It enabled him to play the instrument and make adjustments during its final stages using a simple rig comprising plastic gears, showing the incredibly impressive construction, pinned and ready for playing. .

As an aside to his work on the musical box, Don displayed his patience, ingenuity, determination and skill in repairing the comb of another instrument. The damaged parts were cut and shaped to accommodate new sections of teeth. We had a very good day socialising with friends old and new.

A few weeks later, in November, we had our Christmas meeting which was full of interest. The organettes in the morning included several different models: The 'Little Dot', a rare 16 note USA organette, the Organina, a 16 note (American) model: the Seraphone, a 20-note Maxfield (English) model and the Celestine a 20 note by the Mechanical Organette Co, of New York. The English organettes are suction models (air being sucked through the reeds) whereas American versions operate on air pressure.



All about Names Part 5: Made by Lecoultre

The article is an appreciation and history of the Lecoultre name and impact on the watch and musical box development.

Extract: "The serial number poses a dating problem when compared with Bulleid's dating chart for Henri-Joseph Lecoultre. The highest number is estimated to be 5000 in 1856, the date of his death. *Entendez-vous* is a traditional French song, possibly *Entendez-vous dans le feu tous ces bruits mystérieux*. It was popular and still known today but gives no clue to the date of the movement. Only two other small movements of the snuffbox type, with H. Lecoultre stamped on the comb,

are listed in the International Musical Box Register. They are serial 14198, with 2-airs and serial 16233, with 6-airs. The extent of this range is thus 11973-16233, all seemingly aligning with the Bulleid date line for his Lecoultre & Penelet dating chart (reference Tune Sheet Book supplement 3) which spans 1837 to 1842.

The lowest Lecoultre movement of this type is serial 107 and is stamped LECOULTRE. The few movements known with this name might be by Henri-Samuel Lecoultre of the Piguet family branch not Henri-Joseph Lecoultre of the Golay branch and thus possibly not part of the F Lecoultre production or the others on Bulleid's dating Chart 8. It remains guesswork. However, whether or not this is true, if one extrapolates back to the beginning of the F. Lecoultre curve it appears to start in 1825. The simple explanation is that Henri probably bought serials 11973 & 14198 from Francois-Charles Lecoultre, the F. Lecoultre Frères of the Lecoultre-Piguet branch. There we have it. Clearly made by Lecoultre. True, of course but which one? As regards Henri, he was a man of exceptional skill and fortitude whose personal circumstances can only be described as tragic. To own something made by him is something to be treasured and is a legacy of his memory".



Lecoultre Patent Gem Organette by Roger Booty

Roger describes how he created a new repertoire of music for a rare instrument.

Extract: "So how did I solve the dilemma of creating new music for the Gem? I knew the Peerless and Seraphone had the same 20-note scale, also that the music on both machines travelled at the same speed over the tracker bar, which admits air to the reeds as the punch music passes over. The only difference was that the Peerless music strip was only 3 5/8 inches wide against the Seraphone at 5 1/2 inches. I also knew that the 14-note scales of the Jubal and Gem were identical. So, did by any remote chance their music travel at the same speed? I called Ted Brown, the only person I know who has a Jubal and asked him how long it took for 38 inches of music to pass over the tracker bar. His answer delighted me no end when he confirmed it travelled at exactly the same rate. This meant that I could borrow his 2 5/8 inch Jubal music and transfer it across to the 3 13/16 inches wide bands of the Gem. Luckily everything worked out correctly and I now have a nice little collection of bands, albeit not copies of original Maxfield music but at least copies of contemporary music"

Who was Gevril? .By Chris Fynes

You may remember an article in the first issue of Mechanical Music World about a snuffbox by Aubert & Fils with a miniature landscape painted by the artist Charles Claude Delaye. This is about another similar painted box that has recently come to light.

This one was made slightly earlier, looking at its features, maybe around the mid-1820s. The stop-work on the spring barrel is held in place by a curved spring which fits neatly into tiny shaped grooves around its female counterpart. The comb is screwed on from the underside of the base and has the initials FG stamped on its surface. It is made from a solid block of steel 5/16th of an inch thick. Consequently, there are no lead weights, they being integral to the comb teeth. The colours on its base clearly show the final differential tempering, giving the treble teeth springiness at their roots. This level of detail is what gives the comb its beautiful tone. It also has no dampers, but nevertheless plays noiselessly without, so presumably this is intentional. There is no evidence of a serial number, however at a tiny 1/8th of an inch long comprised of minute letters, it has the name GEVRIL stamped into the bedplate. I can find no reference to this name, or the initials FG in any of the musical box text books that I am aware of, so who was this person, presumably F. GEVRIL, who made this box?

Maybe the name GEVRIL and the initials FG are not so uncommon after all. By the most extraordinary coincidence, I have another two movements in my small collection, both pre-1840, with the initials FG stamped on the underside of the comb.

The first is a standard four-air movement which seems to have been converted to go with a clock or some other device at some point, judging by the weird contraption that someone had fitted to it. This I subsequently removed, returning it back into a normal type of musical box movement. It also had control levers which were cut short, with plugs that must have held extension rods pointing to the front or back, indicated by the superimposed bars I have added to the picture. This may have been part of the same conversion, as when I then extended the length of the levers, they came out to the left in the normal position for the three side controls, therefore giving me the opportunity to mount the movement into a later spare box I happened to have, of the correct size. On the bedplate stamped to the top-left is the serial number 144 ' More unusually it has the names of its four tunes scratched the underside of the comb.

The second is a snuff box type movement, much later than the painted box. As well as having FG stamped under its comb, it too has the names of its tunes scratched on it. This movement is numbered 1463, very close to that of the other. It has the later type of Geneva stop-work and the teeth now have lead weights and dampers attached. The movement has a missing spring and it would need re-pinning but the comb is very fine and otherwise has a nice tone when the cylinder is gently pushed around.

Maybe we have been looking in the wrong place for the name. When I Googled the words 'Gevril. Watches-Gevril Group' it came up with the following text.

'Jacques Gevril was an up-and-coming watch and clockmaker in 1758 when he accompanied his colleague Pierre Jaquet-Droz on a trip to Madrid. There the men, presented a selection of complex musical automata to King Ferdinand VI. The king was so impressed he bought every piece. Jaquet-Droz returned home the following year but Gevril remained in Spain to fortify his reputation as a master watchmaker and was appointed Royal Watchmaker by the king. Gevril lived in Spain for many years thereafter, refining his craft and producing watches for the Crown. Gevril's traditions were survived by future generations of watchmakers including Moyse Gevril and Daniel Gevril, who built their reputations on horological innovations and artistic. enamelling techniques. Today Gevril pocket watches are highly collectible: one is located in the Museum of Geneva and another is part of the collection of the Wilsdorf family, founders of Rolex.'

This was accompanied by a video showing examples of these fine antique pocket watches. Today, amongst other watches, they make the most attractive 'art-deco' style American watches. so I have been able to trace the names of a FRANCOIS GEVRIL and a FREDERICK GEVRIL, who were family relatives during the early 19th century, but no clues beyond that.

Can anybody else shed some light on this conundrum."

Big Ben by Juliet Fynes

Juliet describes the history and construction of Big Ben, the nickname for the large Bell that strikes the times in the Great Clock of Westminster.

Extract: "The mechanism of the Great Clock was designed by Edmund Beckett Denison and George Airy, the Astronomer Royal. Construction was entrusted to the London firm of E J Dent, who completed it in 1854. Pugin's tower took another five years, during which time Denison was able to experiment and instead of using the deadbeat escapement and remontoire, as originally planned, he substituted the more accurate three-legged gravity escapement.

The quarter bells were cast by John Warner & Sons in London. They also cast the original Big Ben in their Stockton-on-Tees foundry, but it cracked beyond repair during testing and it was melted down and a replacement cast at the Whitechapel Foundry. At over thirteen tons it was the largest bell ever cast in Britain at that time and became an instant celebrity. Transporting the bell the few miles from the foundry to the Houses of Parliament was a major event. Traffic stopped as the bell, mounted on a trolley drawn by sixteen brightly beribboned horses, made its way through the streets, which had been decorated for the occasion, cheered along by enthusiastic crowds."



Sale Room Report Auction Team Breker

The article describes a number of interesting lots in Auction team Breker's sale including a musical figure of the Belgian Beer King, Gambrinus. Other lots were a Symphomon 'Erotic' Hall clock and a Singing bird in a miniature piano.

Christian Ritschard and his Musical Tortoise by Juliet Fynes

Extract: "Our cover picture illustrates a very finely carved musical tortoise. It is 9 inches long and contains a standard photograph album-type two-air musical movement, maker unknown. The novelty does not accord with the Black Forest style of carving but maker and the place of tortoise manufacture is known, as shown on the red label: Chr. Ritschard, Sculpture, Montreux Les Avants. Les Avants is a village in the municipality of Montreux in the Canton of Vaud, Switzerland. Nothing seems to be known about him but the workmanship of this carver is of very high and realistic quality. The abbreviation for the first name seems to be for Christian. The 'shell' is tinted and shaded and its rather 'cheeky' face looks up with exquisite glass eyes."

