

## MMW ISSUE 11

### Christmas meeting at the Old School

Our Christmas meeting followed the usual annual theme of some things sublime and others less so: not exactly ridiculous but best described as hilarious. The latter consisted of both old and new examples of automata, some of which can be seen below demonstrated by Nick Lyles, clearly enjoying himself as much as we did. On a more serious note was a delightful Nicole musical box stamped Fe Nicole on the comb but sadly without its tune sheet. Its serial number, 20515 dates it to 1842. This places it in the 'golden age' of musical box arrangements and this example did ample justice to its six operatic airs. The key-wind movement was mounted in a typical plain walnut case. At that time musical box cases were rarely highly decorated and bought for one purpose only: to listen to the music.



### MATTEL

On the face of it there is little in common between Seleol, a smallish British plastics company that only lasted a few decades before being taken over then disappearing, and Mattel, an American company that started as a family enterprise and went on to mop up many of its competitors until it became the global giant, biggest toy company in the world, that it is today. Nevertheless there is a great similarity between some of their products from the 1950s and 60s.



Harold Matson and Elliot Handler founded Mattel Creations in 1945. The company first sold picture frames, and then Elliot began to make doll's house furniture from the offcuts, in a garage workshop. Matson soon sold his share to Handler due to poor health, and Handler's wife, Ruth, took Matson's role. The Handlers were a formidable team as Ruth turned out to have great entrepreneurial flair and Elliot was the innovative, creative genius. The doll's furniture became more popular than the picture frames so the couple decided to concentrate on toys. In 1947, the

company had its first hit toy, a ukulele called "Uke-A-Doodle". It was only suitable for pretend playing but an improved version came out in time for Christmas 1949 containing a hand-cranked musical movement. This was invented by Ted Duncan, known as orchestrator for several Hollywood movies, but also a musical box collector. He studied how musical boxes operated and came up with the idea for an affordable device; a rubber belt with raised studs rotating past a comb with twelve different length metal tines to produce the notes. He built a prototype and approached Mattel with his invention. This was received enthusiastically and added to the Uke-a-Doodle .....



## Two Simple Automata

There are quite a few types of drive for automata, all of which require an even feed of power. Starting from the earliest forms up to the present day there are automata that have been driven by water, weights, springs, electricity, battery, solar power etc. Here are a couple of very simple ones at each end of the spectrum. The first and more modern design, dating from 1950/60, is a display model for a watch and clockmaker's shop counter. It shows a watchmaker at his workbench. A label on the back states "Hackney Right Time" Watch Makers, 366 Mare Street, London, E8. The base is lit by a 15 watt pygmy bulb that illuminates a choice of two glass panels. The wording on one panel gives a full guarantee on their clocks and watches, the other accepts watch and jewellery repairs. It appears that a small number were made and circulated in the trade, but I only know of the existence of one other .....



## Mechanicals Music & Automata Team Breker

On November 11<sup>th</sup> 2017 a number of interesting talking machines did well, with an Edison "Opera" Phonograph, top-of-the-line in 1910 bringing in \$5,700. Also a surreal EMG "Expert Junior", with a papier-mâché horn straight from the pages of Doctor Seuss fetching \$6,500. However Music boxes also sold well, with a Paillard model selling for \$7,500 .....



## Nicole 'Two-per-Turn and Cuendet Sublime Harmonies Piccol' by Chris Fynes

Chris presents these two musical boxes illustrated with an array of photographs. 'The first is a two-per-turn Nicole Frères playing twelve airs. The serial number is 22503 which dates the movement to circa 1842/3 according to the Bulleid Dating Chart. It has an 11.5

Inches long cylinder with a diameter of 3 inches allowing it to take a whole minute to play one of its twelve tunes on a slow turning cylinder. The comb has a total of 124 teeth although the top tooth is not used or turned. This is indicative of the standard sized comb stock then being used; sometimes the redundant end tooth (or teeth) would have broken off by the maker, but obviously not in this case

These large cylinders were originally to play music from overtures where extended playing time was necessary. Their complex rotation also demanded more teeth on the comb; the fewer turns of the cylinder the more teeth you could have, consequently many overture boxes have just 3 or 4 turns. Some of these movements have as many as 250 or more teeth, making them particularly suitable for playing complex variations with many trills, these rare boxes can sound superb. Earlier boxes were designed to play just one two overtures, made up by a number of shorter number of tunes, set on a two-per-turn basis, these were known as part overture boxes. Others played two-per-turn all the way through, such as the Nicole .....

## Some clues about Cuendet – a summary of the family history by Paul Bellamy

The name Cuendet (pronounced Kwendeh) is nowadays mainly associated with small musical novelties. The internet is full of examples for sale. They range from Swiss chalets in the form of trinket and cigarette boxes, novelty spinning wheels, cake stands and small musical boxes. However, the company ceased to exist time after WWII. The market for Swiss musical boxes made in the 1900s was mostly reduced to the mass production of small movements in competition with

other makers such as Thorens, Guissaz, Lador, Paillard and Reuge. As the years passed by, these either ceased musical movement production succumbed during periods of recession and changes in the market after the Second World War, with the exception of Reuge. Time seems to have blanked out the fact that the Cuendets were important players in the manufacture of some fine cylinder musical boxes. One example is described for a Sublime Harmonie Piccolo musical box (see the article by Chris Fynes). Unfortunately, Bulleid was unable to get sufficient information to produce a dating chart for Cuendet products. Part of the reason is in defining which of the many Cuendets could be classed as makers. One of the earliest examples of a Cuendet musical movement is shown for Abraham Cuendet, a 2-air segmented comb movement. See a close up of his signature.



The similarity of this movement with Lecoultre ones of the period is unsurprising because both Saint Croix and Geneva probably had the same sources at the time. Abraham-Louis had three children, a daughter born in 1811, a son Eugène born in 1812 and another daughter born in 1814. He was at Le Lieu in the Joux Valley and an associate of Henri Jaccard, a Justice of the Peace at Culliairy, also near Saint Croix. He was also associated with another Henry Jaccard nicknamed 'à chez Baptiste' to distinguish him from his namesake. Chez Baptiste is a location near Saint Croix and the name Jaccard another of the great in the musical box history of that region. Abraham was the first musical box maker to rent space in the Les Halles building in Ste.-Croix .....

### Who was L.Gangloff?

Some years ago David described a French pedal operated barrel piano by Lacape, patented in France in 1882. It has two barrels of seven airs each. Barrel No. 2 is signed 'L Gangloff, about whom he could find nothing. A recent search on the Internet revealed the following, Léopold Hyacinthe Gangloff, a French composer, was born in Saint-Pierre-lès-Calais on March 16<sup>th</sup> 1856 and died in Paris on August 17<sup>th</sup> 1898.

He was the composer of nearly six hundred songs and piano pieces (polkas, marches...) over the years 1880-1890. including song melodies for words by, among others, Eugène Héros, Ernest Gerny, Jules Jouy, Paul Arène or Émile Carré and sung by the greatest performers of the time, such as Jules Mévisto, Ernest Vaunel, Marius Richard, Yvette Guilbert, Albert Caudieux, Félix Mayol or Charlus. His best known compositions are 'Germinal/Le Plumet and 'Le Ventre de Paris' (the Belly of Paris), with words by Émile Zola and William Busnach. His song 'A Sunburn' is reprised in the film 'The Rules of the Game' in 1939. 'La Böiteuse' ('The Lame Woman') is included in the CD compilation 'Maman et Papa Chantaient', published in 2015 and 'La Levrette de la Marquise' (The Marchioness's Greyhound) is included in the Anthology of French Recorded Song in the years 1900-1920, sung by Ferdinand Gabin in circa 1903. (EPM, 2007). 'Germinal' may refer to the seventh month of the calendar of the first French Republic (1793-1805) .....

