

PICTURE GALLERY

An Early Wheatstone 'Open Pallet' Concertina from Charles Wheatstone's Collection

Notes by NEIL WAYNE

The Concertina Museum has acquired a very early Wheatstone 'open pallet' concertina, its provenance traceable back to the original Kings' College Museum used by Charles Wheatstone to display his inventions from the 1830s onwards. This instrument was part of the large collection of Wheatstone's scientific and musical apparatus that was on display in the college's King George III Museum (by then named 'The Wheatstone Laboratory'), but were cleared from the Museum rooms after Wheatstone's death, and finally dispersed (in very distressed condition) from an attic store-room in the 1960s and 1970s. The instrument was given to a college employee during the 1960s dispersal, when much of the collection was unfortunately being thrown away.

The instrument is a 24-key open pallet English concertina, made in the very early 1830s at Charles & William Wheatstone's London manufactory at 20 Conduit Street. Open pallet concertinas have their air-valve pads ('pallets') and associated levers exposed in the manner of the late-1820s accordéons patented by Demian and other makers, rather than enclosed beneath fret-cut wooden end-plates. Figure 1a-b shows the right hand end of the instrument before (Fig. 1a) and after (Fig. 1b) cleaning and conservation.

This instrument is the fifth known open pallet Wheatstone to appear in collections around the world. And though the surviving examples show many individual variations in terms of reeds, pallet material, levers, bellows frames, and labelling, they all show the 24-key layout that Wheatstone developed for his 24-key Symphonium of around 1825, which he patented in 1829. This un-numbered instrument bears many features that place it amongst the very earliest known concertinas: the ebony levers and circular pearl pallets are close copies of the levers and pallets used by Demian on his 5-key accordéon, patented in 1829 (see www.ksanti.net/free-reed/history/demian.html), while its silver label announcing the address as 20 Conduit Street label is not the common oval appliqué plate, but a semi-circular banded form (see Fig. 2a-b). (When Neil Wayne cleared the final remnants of the Wheatstone material from King's College in the early 1970s, there were four Demian or Demian-style accordéons surviving, each with a pink, Wheatstone-Conduit Street label within the

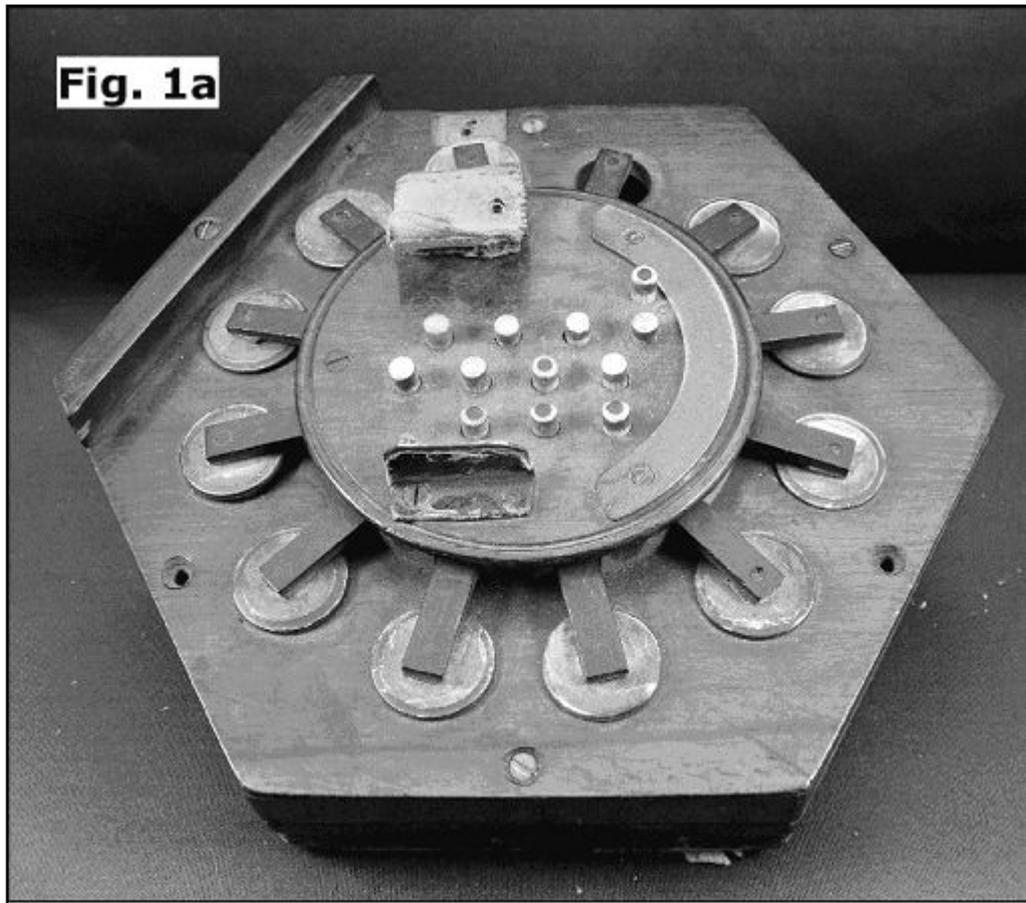
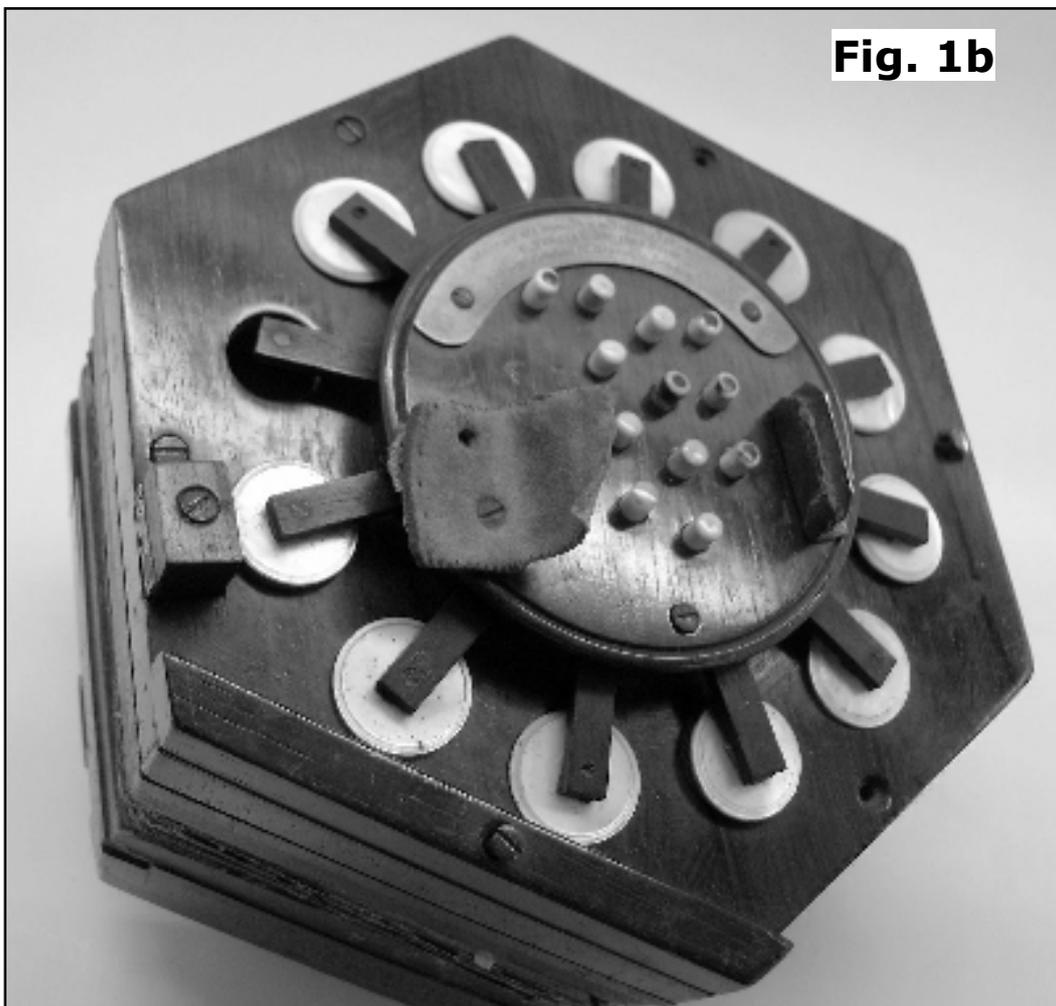
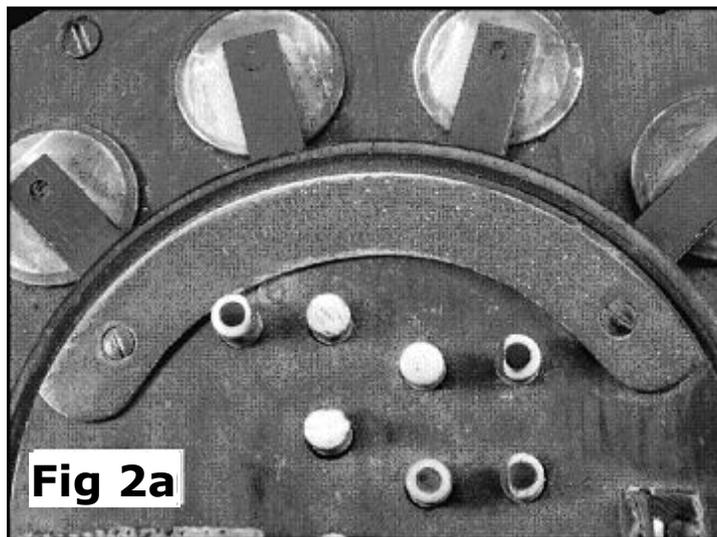


Figure 1a-b shows the right hand end of the instrument before (Fig. 1a) and after (Fig. 1b) cleaning and conservation.



air-valve pallet: these are now in the Wayne Collection at The Horniman Museum, numbered M-15-1996 [5-Key]) M-243-1996 [8-Key], M-586-1996 [10-Key], M-587-1996 [21-Key].)

The later open pallet models have silver-metal levers, and their entire end-plate through which the keys pass is a silver or nickle disc (rather than a circular rosewood plate), and this bears the engraved Conduit Street address. The later open pallet models also have a gilt embossed paper trim around the bellows frame, in common with mid-1830s accordéons.



Finally, I would note that I will be discussing the evolution of the concertina from the various Symphoniums through these early open pallet prototypes to the familiar mid-Victorian design in a forthcoming paper.

Fig. 2a-b. Image of the silver, semi-circular label: (a) prior to conservation/cleaning; (b) after the same.

