

## BRIEFLY NOTED

### **Free and Squeezy: The New Web Catalogue at the Horniman Museum**

ALICE LITTLE

The Horniman Museum has always been committed to improving access to its collections, and to this end April 2008 saw the launch of a new online catalogue featuring some of the Museum's best known collections. Alongside instruments from the collections of Boosey & Hawkes, Carse, Dolmetsch and Music from India<sup>1</sup> will be included entries for a number of free-reed and other instruments from the Neil Wayne Collection.

The new catalogue will enhance the existing online register, giving a more detailed technical description of each object and highlighting noteworthy instruments with a commentary on their wider contexts. Of particular note in this collection is one of the earliest known concertinas made by Wheatstone (M19-1996), as well as a number of prototypes, including the 1844 duette system concertina (M246a-1996) and the 'gliding reed' (M336-1996).

Not limited to concertinas, the Neil Wayne Collection incorporates Wheatstone's own collection of experimental instruments, including an Aeolian harp (M576-1996) which, attached to a concealed piano, once amazed audiences by 'playing itself'! There is also an entry for a wind powered monochord device (M591-1996), bought in 1837 by one of Wheatstone's earliest customers, the famous concertinist Giulio Regondi.

In addition the collection includes instruments by other makers: a rare ivory-ended concertina (M98a-1996) and the only round-ended German concertina known to exist (M550-1996). Meanwhile, instrument number M9a-1996 is notable on account of its first owner, the acoustician-mathematician- linguist Alexander J. Ellis, inventor of the cents system for measuring pitch, whose pencil marks on this instrument suggest that he was experimenting with different temperaments, perhaps as part of his early research.<sup>2</sup>

With such a huge number of significant instruments to document, the team's priority has been to enhance access to information previously only available at the Horniman, rather than to duplicate

general historic background already to be found on the seemingly infinite resources on [concertina.com](http://concertina.com), [concertina.net](http://concertina.net), and similar sites.

However, if the website highlights the particular objects held by the Museum, it also allows a general overview of historic trends in instrument manufacture and the relationships between makers. For example, the choice of wording on a selection of makers' labels reveals the weight of the Wheatstone name throughout the nineteenth century: independent makers might claim prior association with his factory (M232a-1996), or even use fake Wheatstone labels (M168a-1996)!

The new website therefore brings to light a huge selection of instruments from the Horniman Museum—of which the Neil Wayne Collection is only a fraction—and is set to increase in coverage as the project progresses into its second phase. It is hoped that the online catalogue will be of interest and use both to the general public and to researchers who may wish to arrange to see some of the items not on public display. With enhanced textual descriptions and better quality photographic documentation of each object, this is the first time the Horniman Museum's Musical Instruments Collection has been revealed in such detail.

The new catalogue can be viewed online, following the links from [www.horniman.ac.uk](http://www.horniman.ac.uk).

## NOTES

1. The collections refer to (1) the publishers Boosey & Hawkes; (2) Adam Carse (1878-1858), English musicologist and collector-historian of instruments; his collection of some 350 wind instruments forms the core of the Horniman Museum's collection; his two works on the history of the orchestra, *The Orchestra in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (1940) and *The Orchestra from Beethoven to Berlioz* (1948) are classics in their field; (3) Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940), English pioneer in the field of performance practice and in the revival of early music on period instruments in accordance with the style of the period; founder of the journal called *The Consort*; and (4) the title of the current exhibition (March 2008) at the Horniman Museum.

2. On Ellis and the concertina, see Allan W. Atlas, 'Who Bought Concertinas in the Winter of 1851? A Glimpse at the Sales Accounts of Wheatstone and Co.', in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, i, ed. Bennett Zon. Music in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Britain (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 63-64; and 'Ladies in the Wheatstone Ledgers: the Gendered Concertina in Victorian England, 1835-1870', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, 39 (2006), 16.