

INTERNATIONAL CONCERTINA ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

No. 154.

MAY 1968

The MAY MEETING

will be in the afternoon of
Saturday 25th May, from
2-5 p.m.
at CONWAY HALL
Red Lion Square,
London, W.C.1.

(Nearest Underground Station - Holborn)

(In *the absence of the Secretary, the
meeting will be under the leadership of
John Hutcherson, to whom we are indebted
for taking over.

THE MAY TALK

Fred Watts (engagements permitting) give the next talk on
"My Concertina Life and Times". Being a recent recruit to the rank
of concertina players, he is likely to have a different point of view
from those we have heard so far, and we shall welcome the diversion.

OPEN AIR FOLK CONCERT at Well Hall Pleasance, Mall Hall Road, S.E.9.
(next to M&ll Hall Station, Southern Railway) at 7"30 p.m. on Saturday,
25th May. Admission 5/-. You could go there straight from Conway Hall.

HITCHIN

The week-end course will be held from November 15th to 17th (Friday evening
to Sunday tea-time). No advance booking can be accepted, but the syllabus
and booking form will be sent out by letter post about 14th October.
Completed forms should be returned immediately, and places will be allotted
in order of receipt.

This Newsletter is issued for the I.C.A. by the Secretary,
Frank E. Butler, 60 Mayfield Crescent, London, N.9. England.

May 1968.

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REPORT OF THE APRIL MEETING

This was a good and lively meeting, but unfortunately the attendance was poor. Indeed, Mr. Crabb and his friends provided half the company, and a good deal of the interest. It was not a good evening for weather, and rained heavily.

Tommy Williams' talk was a principal feature, and is reported separately. Mr. Crabb also reported on The concertina trade, and was bombarded with questions. A note of 'this is given elsewhere.

Eric Holland, from Worth Matravers, paid his first visit to an I.C.A. meeting, and it was a delight to have him with us. We had some newcomers introduced by Mr. Crabb, and we hope they enjoyed the unusually varied programme.

There were not enough members or the right choice of members for the usual concerted playing, but what was done was well done. Musical items were as follows:

Messrs Butler and Hutcherson commenced with a duet "Maire My Girl". Mr. Court, apologising that rheumatism had prevented him from playing, and that he could only manage "rough stuff", nevertheless played a waltz medley of pleasant recollections.

Mrs. Fordham had returned from a conference in Folkestone, specially for the meeting which was very commendable enthusiasm. She has also met some Essex members, and generally is proving herself an energetic I.C.A.-ite. She played Sound of Music for our enjoyment.

Yet another Sound of Music came from Eric Holland, who proved to be an ANGLO-player extraordinary. His playing is characterised by a strong melody line, with a true legato rarely heard on an Anglo, and a background of delicate accompanying figures. While we had some reservations in respect of his almost continuous forte in the selection and a waltz encore, his subsequent folk dances had excellent piano effects. As a concertina player we rate him high; as an Anglo player very high indeed.

The Butler/Hutch combination returned with some Mayas, and as "they only play together at meetings, were themselves thrilled to be in perfect accord. Fred Watts, unprepared for a solo, found some scraps of music with the top torn off, which turned out to be Solre las Olas Waltz, which he played in fine style. John Hutcherson played a Kreisler solo, preliminary to Tommy Williams talk, while after it Frankk led a "busking" session of American Medley.

Mr. and Mrs. Crabb, right up to date, played "Congratulations" a hit tune of the Eurovision Song Contest, and encored with Rendevous, nicely varied in tempo and dynamics.

And then back to Mr. Court, playing Josha, Mr Holland in Plaiser d'Amour, more Mayas by Butler/Hutch, Fred Watts playing a Danish March to mark Danish week, Tommy Williams in A che la morte, and John Hutcherson in Ciri Ciri Bim. Mr. Crabb played Under Freedom's Flag and Beautiful Ohio artistically, and Mrs. Crabb also contributed to our enjoyment.

Concerted playing was something of a problem, many of the usual players being absent, but a portion of a Haydn Symphony was well handled, and for a finale we had a Cavalcade Selection, so full of old-timers that everyone found something to join in.

CONCERTINAS START AT 2/6.
Tommy Williams talk at the April meeting

Tommy Williams first instrument was a 20 key German concertina and it cost him 2/6d. His next was a 32 key Lachinal Anglo for 18/-. As his wages were only 15/- he paid for it in weekly instalments. He thought the only type of concertina was an Anglo until he heard Alexander Prince, and then he realised that a different instrument must be used to get all those sounds.

So he bought a cheap Duet with brass reeds for 30/. Ch. Jefferies persuaded him to have the reeds changed for steel ones, but after all the adjusting Tommy thought it sounded less good than when it had brass reeds.

A better instrument was imperative, but it took three years of hard saving to acquire a 46 key Duet. He asked Lachinals for a teacher, and they sent him to George Leroy. George Leroy was a wonderful ear player, and finding he had an apt pupil, for a time they played the Clubs together.

Soon the 1914 war came along, and both joined up. On leave after 12 months in the trenches, Tommy decided to take his concertina back with him. It was an instant success, and in all estaminets he visited he was called on to play Destiny and Missouri waltzes.

Between the wars, an article in the Evening News said that the Waltz Destiny was made famous in the trenches by a concertina player. He wrote claiming to be that soldier, and since no-one challenged Tommy Williams' claim, he probably was.

He recalled the beginning of the I.C.A. which stemmed from a Bridgewater player asking Desmond Hart to give a regular page in the ACCORDION TIMES. From this Desmond Hart got the idea of starting the I.C.A., and after he resigned Mr. Butler took over.

Tommy recalled that when he was at Lachinals it was suggested he should become a tuner. He agreed, thinking how useful it would be to be able to tune his own instrument. He did not think that he would get his living by it ultimately.

Then Tommy demonstrated various styles of playing, showing in particular how to lighten the chords and avoid the hurdy-gurdy effect of some duet players. He composed, then and there, a simple tune based on three primary chords, and followed it with his own "Springtime in Battersea" encored by Fascination Waltz.

Finally, by general demand, he gave us Destiny and Missouri Waltzes, round off an enjoyable and historic half-hour.

NEWS OF THE MEMBERS

B. Thornett, 308 Whitefoot Lane, Bromley, Kent, says he "could do with a 55 key Crane Duet, and a cheap 48 English" if anybody has one for sale.

J. Davies of 45 Robertson Street, Eccles Mew Road, Salford 5, Lanes, plays a 72 key Wheatstone Duet, and would like to meet players in his neighbourhood.

We rejoice that Will Gardham is out of hospital, and making good progress. We look forward to seeing him back when properly recovered.

Change of address.

J.W. Young has moved to 9 Barmston Close, Washington Station, Co. Durham. He and his wife had to change houses while the old one was modernised, and rather than face a second upheaval, decided to stay on. He tells us that he had a visit from Tom Jukes, who also played with "the Northumberland and Durham Band.

And that reminds us that Tom Jukes himself wrote to suggest that talcum powder should be a free issue at festivals, and that after the adjudicators remarks on the Kensington Groups performance of Light Cavalry, will festival organisers please follow up with a bucket and brush. (We wonder if he remembers the juvenile road sweepers in the City of London who operated up to about 1920, and were vulgarly known as "sparrow starvers").

Dorothy Nichol and Elsie Smith played duets by Bach and Bartok at the 50th Anniversary Dinner of the Burnley Symphony Orchestra. We are told that the audience gave some queer looks when the item was announced, but they finished to an ovation. Knowing the high standard of musicianship of these two plays, it would have been no more than they deserved.

A.G.Palmer, Milton Cottage, Hoyland, nr. Barnsley, Yorks would exchange a Lachenal Duet 81 keys, plated ends and keys, for a Wheatstone Aeola Baritone.

A welcome note from Harry Minting who rightly says that it is a pity that our festival entries do not have more strangers in the audience.

Jim Floyd, 55 Kellaway Avenue, Bishopston, Bristol 6, writes on his 80th birthday to say how much he enjoyed the London Festival. He is offering for sale his 48 key Lachenal English Concertina, with raised metal ends. It is in good condition, and rather larger than usual. £12.

Mr. and Mrs. Mercer have been attending an E.F.D.S. Course in Douglas, Isle of Man, and Mrs. Mercer has played her concertina for the general dancing session each evening.

HUNTING THE CONCERTINA

Vena McDougall handed in a cutting from the Evening News appealing for concertinas to be forwarded to a school for blind children in Kenya. The I.C.A. pursued the matter, and finds that Mrs. Chard, President of the Southgate Inner Wheel Club had visited the boarding school in Likoni, Mombasa, and stayed with the principal. The Salvation Army sponsors the school, which is for 150 children. There is only provision for 50 at the moment, and these all come from backward homes. As well as their bodily well being, the S.A. provides for their education, and most are doing well. On the cultural side, music is a great adventure and solace, and the choir has already secured a first and a second in music Festivals. There is also a Percussion Group and a concertina band is being formed.

Mrs Chard has handled her appeal from Ruth Winston House, Green Lanes, Palmers Green, London, N., and her association pays the postage (30/-) on each incurred in sending donated instruments to Mombasa. So far four have been given. She does not expect members of the I.C.A. to respond, as she says they will understand concertinas and treasure their instruments, and that is a very understanding attitude on her part.

Nevertheless, if you have an urge to donate the unwanted instrument, here is a worthy cause, bringing joy to children who would have little enough without the Christians looking after them devotedly.

GETTING READY FOR HITCHIN

Bill. King of Uckfield, who was very helpful at the Beginners Sunday Morning at the last Hitchin, is ready to help again. He has already recorded 1½ hours of playing which he thinks forms a model course, and if there is an opportunity of playing it, it could be an inspiration to beginners.

Frank Butler has a set of ninety exercises which he has composed for beginners, taking them from complete ignorance to a modest standard, and these should also be available, apart from wastage through lending.

THE CONCERTINA TRADE

Harry Crabb spontaneously addressed the April meeting of the I.C.A. in one of the most absorbing talks he has given us and although his audience was small, he was bombarded with questions.

He said his firm was thriving and fantastically busy, with orders from all over the world. He now had reports of an increase of players in Ireland.

The prospects of increasing output were poor. Apprentices were not attracted to the trade, and what was wanted was a new factory with twenty new hands trained over several years to specialise in one part of the manufacture. There was no one to undertake the capital investment of this long unproductive period.

It had not been possible to use the services of specialist firms of tool makers, because much of the craftsmanship employed in making concertinas defied conventional machine drawing and measurements. He himself could cut and file to fine limits entirely by sight. The directors of an eminent firm of tool-makers watched him cut twelve reeds entirely by his own judgement, and on measurement there was not half a thousandth of inch different between them. The directors would not undertake the work, or quote. Harry himself was a toolmaker in the aircraft industry during the war, and was noted for being able to work to .01" on sight alone.

Grinding raised additional problems, as even the coolant could affect the composition of the metal, and hence the tone.

Seasoned wood was another problem, as it could not be bought. English sycamore from Devon was best, and that which he was now using had been in stock at Crabb's factory for forty years. It had long periods of seasoning at various lengths and thicknesses before that. Even now, he could not be sure that there would not be movement, particularly with central heating becoming commonplace.

His most reliable asset was Mrs. Crabb, who was a first class bellows maker.

Repairs were a hindrance to production, largely because people had the wrong impression that instruments improved with age and became valuable. They would pay £10 for an old instrument, and spend twenty on renovation, a very poor policy. A recent American visitor had paid \$350 for an 80 year old instrument, and had fortunately now decided to buy a new 56 key English.

Recent orders included two 72 key duets, one for South Africa, and one for the home market with ebony-ends and gold plated keys.

MORE NEWS OF THE MEMBERS

Brigadier Russell of the S.A. has retired. That is to say he has recently played at Bristol, Carshalton, Ealing, Bromley, Dartford, Dulwich, Southend, Histon, and elsewhere. It could be quieter to return to duty. He plays at Central Corps., Kildare Street, Leicester on August 3rd and 4th, and at Wellington St. St.Mary Cray on August 25th and would be delighted to meet I.C.A. Members on those dates.

J. Whalley points out that he lives at 100 Sherwood Drive, Pemberton, Wigan. We had had him on our books as at Sherwood Road every since 1958 at least, and now the G.P.O. think it time we addressed him correctly. Both Mr. Whalley and the P.M.G. have been patient. Please correct your List of Members if you have one.

MORE NEWS OF THE MEMBERS cont.

G.Penrose, of Liverpool, whom we recently announced as a new member is a noted player in his own district, much accustomed to entertaining both the young and the old, and accused by those astonished by his dexterity of having ten fingers on each hand. But he says he wishes he could read music, as he sometimes realises what he misses by playing only by ear. And then he says with a chuckle that he gets enjoyment out of his playing.

A.J.Walker asks us to note his change of address to 6 South Hermitage, Belle Vue, Shrewsbury, Shropshire. Anyone knowing Shrewsbury will realise that this is a case of going round the bend, but anyway, we all wish him and Mrs. Walker much health, happiness and harmony in the new abode.

FRANK BUTLER ANSWERS CRITICISM OF THE HIGHER SUBSCRIPTION

Three members wrote to express their concern at the increase to 15/- of the I.C.A.'s annual subscription, and also asked what had happened to the old rule that provided Honorary Membership to members on reaching the age of 70.

Dealing with the "over-seventies" first, it was decided at the A.G.M. in 1962 not to allow new admissions to this category, and to invite existing honorary members to contribute postage on their copy of the Newsletter. This was because we showed signs of having more over seventy's than we had numbers under that age, and indeed, unless we got a considerable increase in the number of younger members, the privilege would be unworkable.

This was properly announced in the Newsletter of February 1962, and no new admissions have been made to the Honorary List on the score of age. Almost all those who were already on the list now voluntarily pay full subscriptions.

There are two Honorary Life Members, Desmond Hart who was so elected as founder, and myself, who was elected in absence in 1956 on the proposal of Herbert Lorne. It is an honour I value, but the I.C.A. still proves an expensive hobby to me.

A point made by one correspondent was that London members get more for their money.

The difference between country and town members is covered by charging a shilling admission to meetings, so that a member attending all meetings does in fact pay twenty-five shillings a year under the present subscription.

1967 showed an actual deficit, and the Committee decided to use the power already granted to it by the AGM of 1965, and raise the subscription.

Our costs keep going up, and we can foresee further increases. I retire from business next year, and the privilege I have of getting the Newsletter duplicated at cost, will be lost to me and to the I.C.A. Postage will go up, probably to 5d according to the press. I (or my successor) will have to meet much higher bills, or buy a duplicator and typewriter.

Donations are a valuable source of income, and we receive sums varying from a couple of shillings to give pounds. Nevertheless, we do emphasise that a regular subscription income is safer finance.

Your committee decided that fifteen shillings was not a high subscription and that it should be possible to avoid further increases for quite a long time ahead. The Treasurer guards your funds zealously, but ultimately only an adequate subscription can safeguard the future of the I.C.A.

F.E.BUTLER.