

HORNIMAN MUSEUM

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PRESS RELEASE

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WHEATSTONE CONCERTINA LEDGERS GO LIVE

AN award-winning south London museum is ensuring that its collections are being made more accessible to the public after publishing 12 volumes of factory ledgers online from one of the world's most renowned makers of concertinas.

Reading like a Who's Who of the 19th Century, the Horniman Museum's collection of ledgers from the factory of **C. Wheatstone & Co.** detail the musicians, musical instrument makers, music dealers and enthusiasts who bought, hired or exchanged one of the most remarkable instruments to hit the music scene in the early-1800s.

Itemising a wealthy clientele including names such as the Duchess of Wellington, Viscount Falmouth and His Highness Duleep Singh – the Maharajah of Lahore – the fascinating collection of ledgers document the manufacturer's output from 1834-1891.

Now undergoing a dramatic resurgence in popularity, the concertina was first invented by scientist **Sir Charles Wheatstone** (1802-1875), whose name is famously associated with a scientific instrument known as the 'Wheatstone Bridge.'

Born into a family of musical instrument makers, his patents of 1829 and 1844 ensured that his London family firm remained as the pre-eminent manufacturers of concertinas in the UK for decades to come.

The hexagonal bellows-blown wind instrument is now most familiarly known as the 'squeeze box' that accompanies folk music and dance. However, 150 years ago the concertina's repertoire largely consisted of arrangements of opera arias - enhancing its appeal to aristocratic champions.

By the 1850s the demand for the concertina was huge. Wheatstones' instruments commanded impressive prices, and were made from high quality materials. The names of **Giulio Regondi** - the virtuoso who promoted Charles Wheatstone's concertina - and other eminent composers and concertina soloists such as **Richard Blagrove**, appear regularly in the ledgers.

So do those of musical instrument makers and dealers such as Fentum, Köhler and Prowse, who no doubt added this fashionable new invention to their stock.

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The factory ledgers are also valuable documents of social history, recording the payments made to workers during the mid to late 1840s. They list some of the specific tasks undertaken by them, from fret-cutting to French polishing.

In addition to the concertinas' prices and purchasers' names, the ledgers also itemise serial numbers and dates of sale, together with details of their design.

Keeper of Musical Instruments at the Horniman, Margaret Birley, said: 'Until now, extensive research into the 19th century ledgers has only been possible for those who have been able to travel to the museum in Forest Hill. Now anyone with access to the internet can view the ledgers online at www.horniman.info and this will reduce the demand for the original documents.'

She added: 'By means of making the ledgers available electronically, the museum is simultaneously fulfilling two major objectives - to increase public access to its collections and preserve the materials that it holds in trust.'

One scholar who has made extensive use of the online ledgers is Professor of Music and Director of the Centre for the Study of Free-Reed Instruments at the City University of New York, Allan Atlas.

Atlas comments: 'Using the Wheatstone concertina ledgers is like having the original manuscripts at my office or home here in New York. In some respects, the online ledgers are actually better than the originals, since I can enlarge a page, see several pages side by side, or print colour copies.'

The Horniman's concertina collection is of international significance, and many of the examples purchased by the Museum in 1996 can be seen in the state-of-the-art **Music Gallery**, in a display that tells the story of Charles Wheatstone's concertina.

The original copies of the Wheatstone factory ledgers are now housed in the Library of the Horniman Museum, which is re-opening to the public in the wheel-chair and family friendly CUE Building on Tuesday 5th July.

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For more information and images please contact Antony Watson, Press Officer, on 020 8291 8166 or email awatson@horniman.ac.uk

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Notes to Editors:

- The project of digitising the ledgers, enhancing the results and creating both the website and the CD ROM was devised and executed by Robert Gaskins. The Horniman Museum owes a profound debt of gratitude to him for this work, and for the gift of his time to undertake it.
- The Horniman Library holds sources relating to the core subjects of the Horniman Museum: natural history, anthropology and musical instruments. It houses over 2,000 written sources, both books and periodicals, for the study of musical instruments and musical traditions. It also holds important archives of two eminent firms of British musical instrument makers: Boosey & Hawkes & Co. and C. Wheatstone & Co.
- The Horniman Library is open without appointment from 10:30am to 5:30pm, Tuesdays to Saturdays, and on Sundays from 2pm to 5:30pm. The sources in the Library are for reference only. The Library's catalogue is available on-line at www.horniman.ac.uk
- In 1996, generous grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Science Museum's PRISM fund enabled the Horniman Museum to purchase some 600+ concertinas and related free reed instruments, together with a substantial archive, from the Concertina Museum in Belper. The archive included the 12 surviving 19th century ledgers from the C. Wheatstone & Co. concertina factory in London.
- In 2003, the surviving 20th century ledgers of the C. Wheatstone & Co. concertina factory, currently on loan to the Horniman Museum by the current proprietor of the firm, were digitised and mounted on a dedicated free website www.horniman.info. During the year after its launch 81,248 pages were viewed by visitors to the website.
- The Horniman was given four stars by Mark Fisher in his recent landmark publication Britain's Best Museums and Galleries. Last year, the museum was awarded Museum of the Year 2004, London Family Attraction of the Year 2004 by the Good Britain Guide, whilst its 16½ acres of gardens was awarded Green Flag status. The Gardens also scooped an award for Britain's Best Parks South East region in autumn 2004 and were 'highly commended' by the Royal Horticultural Society during Lewisham Borough Council's Britain in Bloom campaign last year. The museum's Centenary Development has been awarded a Civic Trust Award and a prestigious Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Award for architectural excellence.
- A new £1.5m aquarium is planned to open in Spring 2006. It will replace the existing Horniman Aquarium which is now closed to the public whilst it is undergoing refurbishment.
- Enjoyed by more than 750,000 visitors to date, the Horniman opened its award-winning Centenary Development in 2002 - doubling the public space. Unlike any other London museum, the Horniman displays collections which provide a window into our natural and cultural worlds, from vodou altars to musical instruments.
- The Horniman is core-funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and since 1990 has been governed by an independent charitable trust.
- The Horniman is situated on the South Circular Road (A205) in Forest Hill, with free parking in surrounding streets. It can be easily reached by train to Forest Hill from London Bridge (13 minutes), London Victoria, New Cross Gate (East London line), East Croydon, and by local buses. (176, 185, 312, 356, P4 stop outside the museum)
- Opening hours: Open daily 10.30am – 5.30pm. General admission to the Horniman Museum and Gardens is free.
- Access: The Centenary Development and the gardens are both wheelchair and pushchair friendly, as is the majority of the original building, with lift access and accessible toilets. The museum's public information number is 020 8699 1872.