

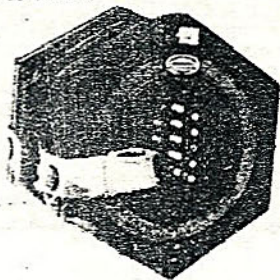
The Concertina Trade in Victorian Times.

AN ECHO FROM THE PAST —

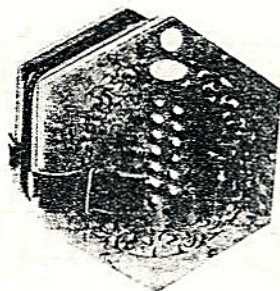
George Jones was a noted manufacturer of concertinas, retiring from the trade about 1910. His instruments are becoming scarce, although it is possible that many remain in use in the Salvation Army. The following is taken from a manuscript left by him, and is given as far as possible in his own words. It is published for the first time, being taken from the I.C.A. Newsletter of September, 1855.

Recollections of the English Concertina Trade. by George Jones, with comments from Frank E. Butler and Neil Wayne.

"I was born in 1832, and commenced working in 1844 for a Mr. Austin, who made complete concertina "pans" for Mr. Wheatstone. The work was all done by hand as "outwork", and delivered to Wheatstone's for further assembly. Tops, frames and cases were also made as outwork, each part being made by hand, press tools not having been introduced. Metal work was made at the factory, where finishing and tuning also took place, with Mr. RockChidley, Wheatstone's nephew assisting. In 1847 a Mr. Nickolds and his two sons were engaged as tool makers, and at the same time Messrs. Lachenal, Harvey and Shaller supplied screws. Mr. Lachenal soon became the tool maker, and Mr. Nickolds commenced manufacturing on his own account in Clerkenwell, with his second son as tuner.



38 Key English No. 106 by Joseph Scates, 40 Frith Street, Soho, London. Early form with circular frets.

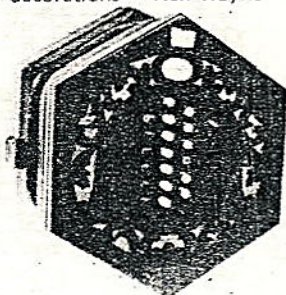


48 English, No. 155, by Joseph Scates, 40 Frith Street, Soho. Finished in Amboyna wood.

A Mr. Scates, then employed by Wheatstone's as a tuner also left and commenced manufacturing in Frith Street, Soho, with a Mr. Austin attending to the woodwork, and myself looking after note fixing, reducing and voicing. Very shortly, Mr. Austin also started manufacturing on his own, and as I went with him I was able to learn every branch of the business"

Jones here indicates the extent to which Concertina making was very much a "cottage industry", with virtually all parts being made as "out-work" by specialists. By working at every aspect of the trade, he acquired the experience necessary to manage and later control, his own large firm.

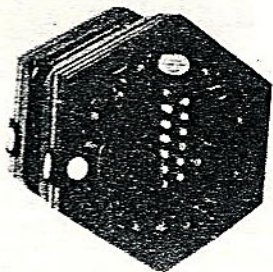
The nature of the trade meant that only good craftsmen who knew all the contacts, suppliers and outworkers could leave his employer and start up his own firm; when one examines instruments made by Nickolds, Dove, Joseph, Scates, George Case and the like, many points of similarity in construction are evident, such as the ubiquitous gold starred bellows paper. Yet each maker exercised his individuality, especially in the designs on the fretwork ends and in gilding and other decorations — Neil Wayne



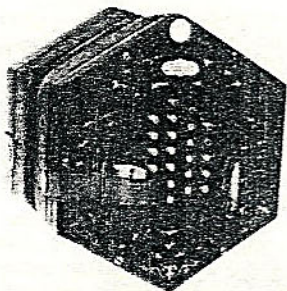
48 English by Nickolds and Co. No. 8310. Labelled "latest improved Concertina. Nickolds and Co., Manufacturers, London."

"I had played the French accordion from an early age, and had also learnt to carry out my own repairs. I soon obtained repair work to do in my own time, and further added to my income by appearing on the Music Halls of the day as a solo and instrumental artist. As soon as the German concertina came on the market, I purchased one, and was soon able to play it. I claim to be the first to perform on it publicly." French Accordeons, Flutinas or "Flautinas" were widely imported into England from 1840 onwards, and were cheaper than concertinas at that time. The largest importers were the firms of M. Howson, Winrow and Son, and Jabez Gregory, all based in the warren of streets around Hollow Stone, Nottingham. All these firms were agents for the London concertinas makers, and soon imported quantities of the cheap German concertinas upon which Jones, Crabb, and later Charlie Jeffries based their improved Anglo-German and Anglo Chromatic instruments — Neil Wayne.

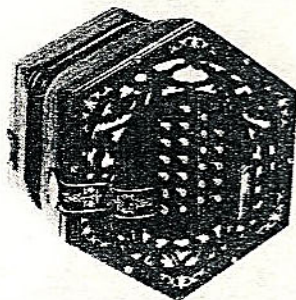
"To return to the manufacturing side, Mr. Scates sold his business to Professor George Case, who operated from an address in Bond Street. Prof. Case was unsuccessful, and again sold the business to Messrs. Boosey and Co., who placed the manufacturing under the care of a Mr. Giles, a tuner. Others also set up their own workshops, including Mr. Dove, who started in Poland Street, but soon sold out to Keith Prowse, which firm produced very good instruments. Mr. Rock Chidley established himself in Oxford Street, and made harmoniums.



48 English by William Dove,
20 Poland Street, Oxford Street, London.

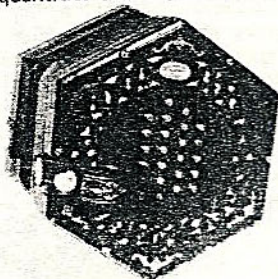


48 English No. 2788, by George Case, labelled
"Patent Concertina by George Case, Boosey &
Sons, Holles Street, London". Brass inlaid,
with gilded Bellows.



48 English No. 3946, by George Case. Pearl inlaid,
with ornately gilded straps & bellows, labelled
"Patent Concertina by George Case, Boosey & Co.
Regent Street, London." This instrument has an
unusual double layered reed pan.

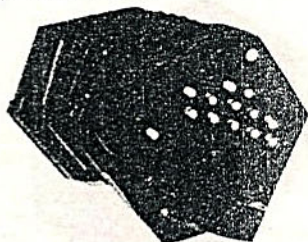
Mr. Lachenal, although not a musician, was a clever engineer, and a good business man. With the aid of his tooling and machinery, he was able to produce concertinas more cheaply, and offered very low prices to shops prepared to take good quantities over a period. Few



48 English No. 6898, by Louis Lachenal. Labels read "Joseph Scates, Manufacturer of the
Professor of the Concertina, 10, Wellington Street,
Dublin."

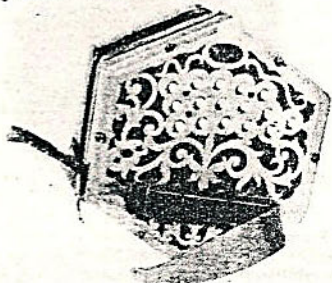
retailers could keep their agreements, and Lachenal thereupon became a wholesaler and exporter as well as a manufacturer, nearly capturing the trade for a time".

Though Louis Lachenal's early instruments are virtually identical to contemporary Wheatstones, Lachenal soon turned to mass production techniques, and flooded the nation's musical instrument dealers with his instruments. Over sixty different dealers and wholesalers labels and stamps have been recorded on Lachenal instruments, and his Concertinas outnumber Wheatstones by over 2 to 1 in the current-card index of Newsletter subscribers' instruments. — Neil Wayne.

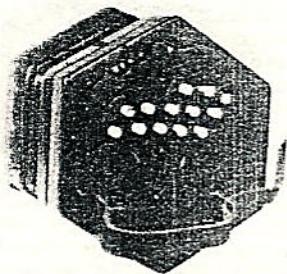


26 + 1 key Anglo, No.7909, by George Jones. A semi-miniature model, with handwritten music label. "Watson-Tuner, 35 Gordon Rd. Aldershot, Dec 1881"

"I was at that time using a German concertina, which had only one semitone, and for my own performance made one with twenty-six keys fully chromatic. But I tired of the life of the Music Halls, and took employment with Mr. Nickolds for a time, until Mr. Austin, my first master invited me to manage his new premises in Commercial Road, teaching, managing the shop, and supervising the workshop. The business made money fast, too fast for Mr. Austin, who spent liberally on drink, and being taken ill, died soon after".

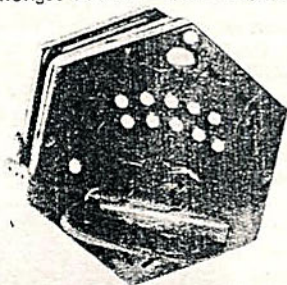


32 key Anglo, No.27807, by George Jones. A late model, with metal ends, and ink labels on the reed pans.



26 key Jones "Broad steel reed" Anglo, made for the Salvation Army. It bears the army crest. Note the crude, very open frets.

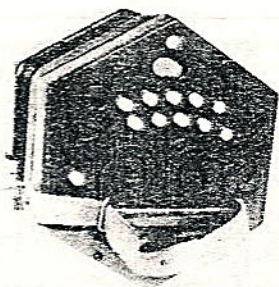
The address which appears on the earliest Jones's such as No. 4996, is 2, Lucas Place, Commercial Road East. On later models, the address is 350, Commercial Road East, London. George Jones's numbering system appears to be continuous, and the highest I have seen is 27807, a 32 key Anglo. In the later years he made them to special order for the Salvation Army with "S.A." carved in the fretwork, for J. Wallis of 135 Euston Road, with "J.W." worked into the design, and for Campbells, of 103 Irongate, Glasgow, amongst others. — Neil Wayne.



20 + 1 key Anglo, by George Jones. No.17583, and labelled "J. Wallis, Patent Concertina, 135 Euston Rd., London, NW". Note the "J.W." in the fretwork.

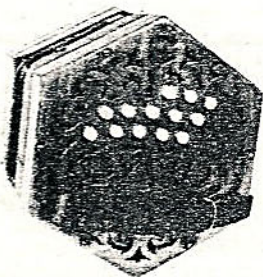
"Mr. Shaller of Lachenal's came to me as tool-maker and I commenced production on the Anglo concertina, being immediately successful in securing a large order from J. Scates, now in Dublin. The whole business was now in my hands, and I arranged for the production of the English concertina as well".

George Jones made English concertinas in at least eleven different styles, not including his piccolo, baritone and bass concertinas. There was also his organ-tone concertinas, with two sets of reeds arranged to play in octaves, and a piano concertina, with white and black studs graphed as on a piano keyboard, G, to B on the left hand and C' to E'' on the right.



20 - 1 key Anglo, No.17440, by George Jones. Brass reeded, with the "350 Commercial Rd. East" label.

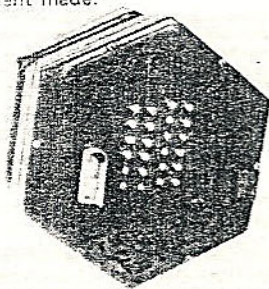
The George Jones catalogue has more than fifty variations of Anglo-Concertinas of his own make, grouped into qualities class A, B or C. There is also an 'organ tone' Anglo with reeds playing in octaves, and Jones' perfect Anglo-German Concertina, patented June 4th, 1884. The catalogue description is ambiguous, but probably means that this anglo concertina was fully chromatic and could be played in any key. — F.E. Butler



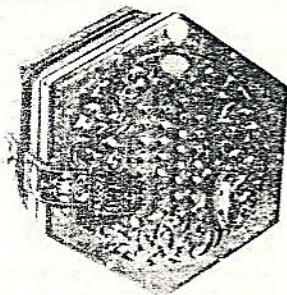
26 key Anglo by George Jones. A developmental form between the 20 key and 30 key Chromatic Concertina.

"In 1853 I commenced to make harmonium reeds, and four years later complete harmoniums, evolving the first portable for Mr. Turner of Cheapside. The demand for portable harmoniums was so great that I was quite unable to keep up with it, and a firm in France improved on my design and found a very large market for it." Probably a reference to the large Parisian firm of Busson, who began turning out a large range of improved accordions, and the Harmoniflute or "Lap Organ", an early portable harmonium. — Neil Wayne.

"By 1859 I was producing English and Anglo concertinas under the name "Celestial". In 1870 I manufactured the first Broad Steel Reeds, later advertised with the slogan "Never wear out, never go out of tune". It was necessary to enlarge the 48 keyed English to take them, and the result was the most powerful instrument made."



48 English No.3295, by George Jones. Broad steel reeds, with Commercial Road labels.



56 English, No.17431, by George Jones. An opulently decorated model, with walnut ends, silver keys, engraved finger rests, silver inlays, gilded bellows, and fitted walnut case.

He also made an English concertina with the pan enclosed in a swell chamber as in an organ, the shutters operated by a small lever controlled by the thumb protruding through the thumb strap. Only one was made, and it was successful, except that swell effects could be obtained equally well with normal bellows control. Long after his death, the swell device was removed, and the instrument was used professionally without it, the cavity seeming to add resonance to the tone. — F. E. Butler.

"My pupils included many then popular artists, among them the Brothers Webb for whom I made 56-keyed instruments with metal tops, and a 40-key piccolo, which they used continuously, their engagements taking them all over the continent and to America, as well as the provinces.

The Salvation Army was a major customer, for fifteen years. The Anglo was the instrument mostly required, and it had to be made in the same pitch as their brass band instruments". At no time did George Jones make Duet Concertinas, to which he had a great aversion. But he made melodeons, harmoniums and folding portable harmoniums as well as English Organs (whatever variation of the harmonium there may be).

The catalogue includes testimonials from music-hall artists, minstrels, and musicians, presumably famous in their day. George Jones wrote a tutor for the Anglo Concertina and also for the banjo, the latter instrument being listed as "own make" at prices from 6/6 (32½p). How this venerable Victorian found time to teach is a marvel, but he certainly claimed some famous players as his pupils. — F. E. Butler

"I wrote and published a tutor for the Anglo, and made a 42-keyed fully chromatic instrument which I patented. I effected various improvements to reed design, and designed a chromatic melodeon." From the Catalogue of George Jones about 1880 it seems that in addition to supplying concertinas, melodeons, harmoniums of his own make, he also had a considerable trade in pianos, and in all the instruments of the orchestra, military and brass band. The catalogue includes tables of the requirements of bands of various sizes, so he must have experienced enquiries for complete equipment. In the Catalogue there is an illustration of the factory and shop in Commercial Road, Stepney, and the premises appear to be commodious; three stories, with separate retail, wholesale and factory entrances. It is thought that about fifteen people were employed in the factory, and others in the shop. At least two travellers were employed, so as the wholesale side of the business must have been important. — F. E. Butler

"I have had fifteen apprentices, most of whom have latter done very well in the trade. Now I am resting in my 81st year after a happy and prosperous life, only waiting for the last call." As regards the man himself he was a typical Victorian parent and small manufacturer. He came from humble stock, his grandparents probably moving to London from Staffordshire. The family bible has entries on the end-papers concerning members of the family in Wood Street, Cheapside, London, in 1790. George Jones cared for his elderly forebearers in their declining years, no light burden on a young business man with a large family. He married twice. His first place of business and his home was burned down, and a miniature banjo

no more than four inches long saved from the window of the shop was preserved until it disintegrated a few years ago. A young woman neighbour who watched the rescue of the first wife and her two children became the second wife within two years, and by her he had three sons and three daughters.

All were given a good education by the standard of the day, but all had to enter the factory as they left school. The home was run by three servants, for mother was responsible for the retail side of the business. It is said that although no musician, she could play a scale and a few chords on almost any instrument. She had an outstanding knowledge of the sheet-music trade, then much bigger than now. The eldest son was a good musician and became organist at the City of London church of St. James, Garlickhythe, and to help him a pipe organ was built in the Commercial Road factory. He combined his factory work with the retail and repairs departments and was much beloved by buskers and other itinerant musicians whose instruments he used to repair free of charge. Much trade was done with sailors from the nearby docks, whose friendship was shown by the gift of many curios from abroad.

The eldest son died suddenly, probably from a coronary, and the eldest daughter died in her teens. The other two daughters worked in the factory. Both sang and played the piano, but never the concertina. Both were members of the local church choir and performed at local concerts. They married away from the business.

The two daughters of the first marriage were also in the factory. One made a run-away marriage with one of the workmen, and in true-story book fashion, after a suitable interval of time the workman regained his job, and the master accepted the first of fourteen grandchildren that followed, some of whom became concertina players and makers. The second daughter of the first marriage married one of the travellers, and in due course their only son emigrated.

George Jones retired in 1899, leaving his two other sons to succeed to a highly prosperous business. But they lacked their fathers devotion to the business, and possibly did not agree. The younger withdrew his portion and emigrated, so lacking capital and probably energy, the remaining son found himself with a failing business.

George Jones returned to pay off the creditors at some loss to himself, and then settled down to a decade of peaceful retirement. On his death in 1919 his will was proved at a sum of reaching five figures, which in the values of the day was no mean sum.

In his declining years he was a stern grandparent, respected more than loved, but capable of generosity. He kept a good table and would pour out jokes over meals at which everyone dutifully laughed. All admired his poetry, which was in fact fearful doggerel verse, and he wrote a few ballads on patriotic themes. He became stone deaf, but would occasionally bring out a small concertina, and play "Ecoutez Moi", on it. This one-time favourite piano-forte still appears in the "Star Albums". Until deafness became severe, he used to visit band performances, and in many cases the conductor and bandsman would come down to speak to him in the interval after the performance. He must have been well-known in the London music scene, as shown by his retirement notice, printed here:—

Mr. Jones died in 1919, probably soon after writing the above. His sons had all pre-deceased him, but he left several daughters and many grand-children. As far as is known now are in the trade at the present time, although a certain amount of musical talent has from time to time been evident. — F. E. Butler

Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review
1st September 1899

Retirement of Mr. G. Jones

Fourteen years ago we gave a brief biography of this gentleman, whose business premises in the Commercial Road, London are well known to many of our readers. Mr. Jones has just retired in favour of his sons, Arthur George and Harry Sidney, who will continue the business under the firm name of "George Jones & Sons", and let us hope with similar — if not more — success than heretofore.

Before the late proprietor retires in that ease and rest which is his due, it ought to be recorded that he made the first Anglo-German concertina (twenty-two keys) so long ago as 1851; three years later his chromatic Anglo-German (twenty-six keys) was brought out, ultimately one with thirty-four keys coming to the front, and possibly assisting to found the concertina trade. In 1855, he made the first portable harmonium and the first cottage harmonium, the latter to retail at five guineas. Ten years later, our friend enlarged the size of the English concertina, thus admitting of the use of broader steel reeds. About this time he designed and made broad steel "Anglos" for the Salvation Army. Other items are as follows: in 1876 he wrote and published the first Tutor for the Anglo-German instrument; in 1855 brought out an improved piano concertina, &c.; also about the same time patented his improved chromatic concertina (forty-two keys) and an improved portable harmonium, which latter holds its ground in the estimations alike of players and dealers.

Mr. Jones in bidding farewell to his many and long-known friends in the music trade, hopes for a continuance of business for his sons and successors.



Eileen Anderson Folk

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