

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE

KF3-07

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# Good bye To An Old Friend

## The History Of The Cleethorpes Gavi, (As I Know It)

by Phillip Upchurch

First of all let me say there is no certainty as to the facts of this organ's early history other than it was built by Gavioli, however, the late Mr. Eddie Rowbotham, who had a long association with the instrument, once told my father that this particular Gavioli, built as an 87 key instrument, was first owned in showland by Fred. Gray of Hampstead, London.

It is known that in the early days of the last century, Mr. Gray had a cinematograph show containing an 87 key Gavioli organ. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to locate a photograph of this show to compare the instrument with the 'Cleethorpes Gavi'.

Just prior to WW1, Fred. Gray purchased the ex. Jack Harris

spinning top Gondola Switchback ride which was later fitted with motor cars, it may be possible that another 87 key Gavioli came into his possession with this ride, although Mr. Gray used the famous ex. Charles Marshall's larger 89 key 'Black Boy' Gavioli in the centre of this machine as shown in Fig. 1.

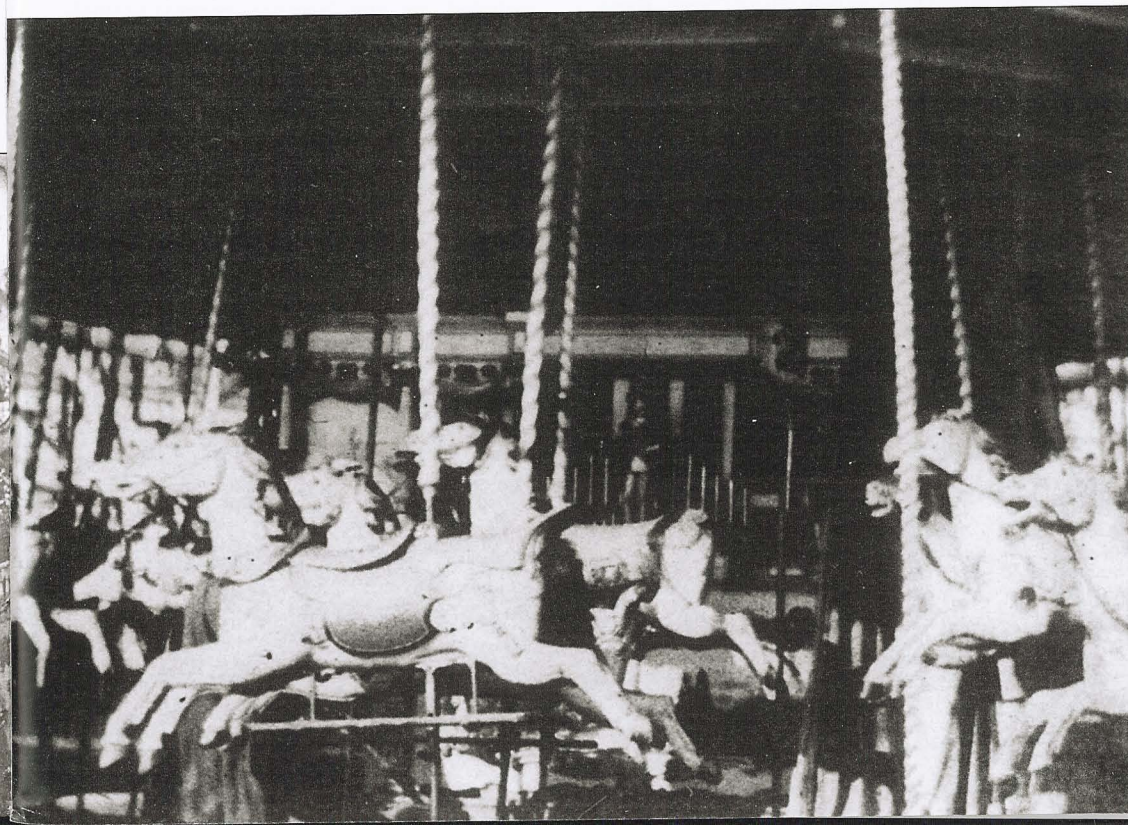
When in 1920 Fred. Gray had a brand new Savage Motor Car scenic railway built containing a 98 key Gavioli, reduced from 110 key, it is believed that the spinning top machine, along with an 87 key Gavioli, were taken in part exchange for the new ride. The 'Black Boy' organ was retained by Mr. Gray and it later saw service in Harry Gray's 4 abreast gallopers.

Fig. 1



Savages of Kings Lynn utilised the ex. Harris spinning top ride's centre and with new parts, plus parts from the ex. Charles Marshall's standing top Motorcar Switchback ride, created a fresh machine for Lancashire traveller Arthur Bates of Rhode Heath who opened the ride for the first time at Belle Vue in 1920. However, it appears that he did not keep the ride long before selling it to showman Mr. George Wilkie of Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire. Mr. Wilkie travelled the ride to a few local fairs but eventually, it is said, stopped taking the machine out and transferred the 87 key Gavioli into his Savage built 3-abreast gallopers Fig. 2. This ride became a permanent fixture at the 'Wonderland' amusement park at the side of Cleethorpes railway station on the sea front.

Fig. 2.



For many years the gallopers stood with other rides outside the 'Wonderland' building, as can be seen in Fig.3. The building still stands today and it is used to house Sunday markets whilst the area where the rides once stood is now the market's car park. The Gavioli and Gallopers changed ownership several times along with the 'Wonderland' complex and past owners include Sam Brumby, Smith's and the Felecey Bros.

In 1950 the original rounding boards were dispensed with and replaced, it is said, with a set from a German built Flying Machine ride as seen in Fig. 3. My father was told, however, that a local carpenter and joiner had built the replacement set of boards as well as a similar set which were fitted to Smith's 2 abreast Gallopers which were located in the arcade at Mablethorpe further down



Fig. 3.

the coast. This ride should not be confused with the Gray Bros. 3- abreast Gallopers which were situated on the sea front at Mablethorpe, the 87 key Gavioli from which is owned today in preservation by Mr. Dan Shorey.

During 1952, the renowned fair-ground organ builder and restorer, Victor Chiappa, converted the 87 key 'Cleethorpes Gavi' as seen in Fig 4. to the 89 key V.B. scale, adding to the organ both violin and baritone pipes. No built out baritone case was ever constructed or, in fact, needed as the painted bottom centre panels surrounded by carvings fitted beautifully in front of the new baritones giving the Gavioli an individual and unique appearance. (Unlike today's cloning of galloper organs with built out bottom centre sections). The instrument was also re-decorated a few years later. Musical notes were painted across the top of the organ's facade and a lovely picture of a

lady laying on a chaise longue was painted on the bottom centre section placed in front of the baritone pipes. Fig.5. I remember that my mother loved this painting and was quite upset when we last visited the organ around 1971-2 and found that it had been painted over.

During the winter months at Cleethorpes, the Gavioli was taken inside the 'Wonderland' Building and hoisted up off the ground. When my father enquired about this he was told, 'We do it to stop the rats getting at it!'. This annual procedure may well have saved the instrument from damage during the terrible 'Great Storm' and ensuing floods of 1953. The organs owned by Billy Butlin just down the coast at Skegness weren't so lucky and due to flooding sea-water, never played again. The Gavioli did, however, lose about 100 books of music from its' repertoire at Cleethorpes, when the shed where they were stored was flooded by sea-water.

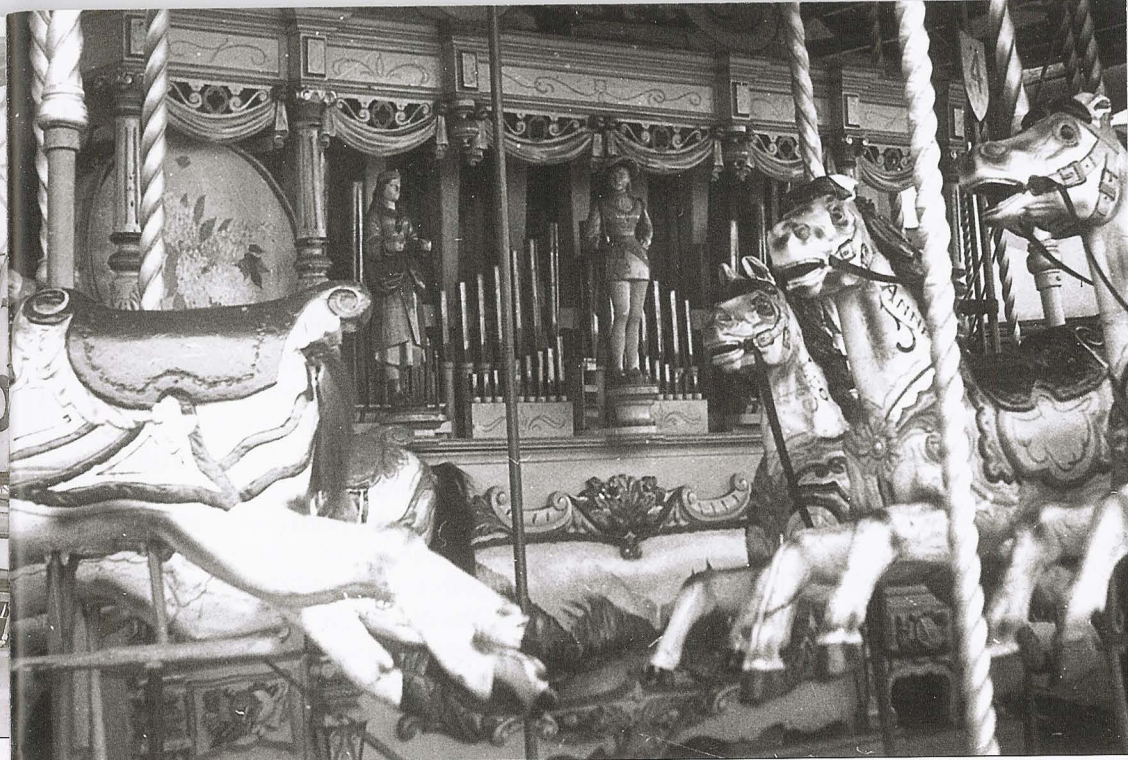


Fig. 4. (above).

Fig. 5. (below).



In 1962, an endless music book hopper was purchased for the organ so that a continuous book of music, also known as a loop book, could be used, thus dispensing with the need for a key frame operator. A list of endless music selections still with the 'Cleethorpes Gavi' in 1969 was compiled by the late Mr. Frank Priest who used to work on the ride. It was sent to me many years ago by fellow organ enthusiast Mr. Karl Plastow. Sadly Mr. Priest died a few months before the organ he had waited so long to see and hear again had been restored.

LIST OF ENDLESS MUSIC SELECTIONS  
Compiled by Mr. Frank Priest.

**No. 1 Selection;**

*Manhattan Beach March*  
*Pepe*  
*76 Trombones*  
*Sailor, Stop your Roamin'*  
*Meet Mr. Callaghan*  
*Walking To Missouri*  
*That Old Pianna Rag*  
*Lassie From Lancashire*  
*Don't Dilly Dally On The Way*  
*My Girls' A Yorkshire Girl*  
*Zampa*

**No. 2 Selection, (1961);**

*Little Girl*  
*Anchors Aweigh*  
*A Summer Place*  
*Seven Little Girls*  
*Fings Ain't Wot They Used To Be*  
*South Rampart Street Parade*  
*Hey, Look Me Over*  
*Magic Moments*  
*Lonesome and Sorry (this book now owned by P. Upchurch)\**  
*My Old Man's A Dustman*  
*Make 'Em Laugh*

**No. 3 Selection, (1960);**

*Variety Palace No. 1 Selection*  
*Nights of Gladness (Waltz)*  
*What Do You Want To Make Those Eyes At Me For?*  
*Marche Militaire*  
*Looking High High High*  
*Everybody's Doing It*  
*Why*  
*Poppa Piccolino*  
*The Middy March*

**No. 4 Selection, (1963);**

*The Can Can*  
*June Is Bustin' Out All Over*  
*You, You, You*  
*Carousel Waltz*  
*The Rich Maharajah Of Magadore*  
*Slow Boat To China*  
*?*  
*12th Street Rag*  
*Powder Your Face With Sunshine*  
*La Cumparsita, Tango*  
*?*

**Separate hand changes of music;**

*The Dam Busters March*  
*Lynwood*  
*Wonderful Copenhagen*  
*Bridges Of Paris*  
*The Last Stand March*  
*Mister Cuckoo*  
*My Fair Lady Medley*  
*South Pacific Medley*  
*Oklahoma*  
*The Washington Greys March*  
*Make It A Party, Medley*  
*Puppet On A String*  
*Down At The Ferry Boat Inn*

The late Mr. Priest goes on to say that, 'There were about another couple of dozen broken books, some too badly torn or damp to play. About 100 books were ruined by the floods in 1953 and the very old books on green card were thrown out around 1954'.

\*I do know that Mr. Priest made an error in his list regarding 'Magic Moments' and 'Lonesome And Sorry' which were coupled with some more tunes because they were with Arthur Middleton's Marengi in 1963, sold to him by Eddie. Arthur already had 'Lonesome And Sorry', albeit a different arrangement so he cut it off and gave it o my father.

During the 1950s and until 1963, the ride's manager was the late Mr. Eddie Rowbotham. Eddie really loved and cherished the 'Cleethorpes Gavi', although any major work was always, as far as I know, carried out by Mr. Victor Chiappa. It has been said that this was Victor Chiappa's favourite 89 key Gavioli and the last time he overhauled it was in the winter of 1966-67. Fig. 6.

In 1965, the organ and ride were moved inside the 'Wonderland' building, possibly to protect it from the salty sea air. It did seem to me however that during its' last few years in Cleethorpes it was a matter of so long as it makes a noise, it will do!

On our last visit it took me a while to make out what it was trying to play. The music was constantly running off track or getting jammed in the key frame. Most of the ride's horses had lost their tails and some had legs broken off.

Around 1970. the 'Wonderland' amusement centre changed hands again passing from the Felecey Bros. to Mr. Dudley Bowers and in 1976 the Gavioli and unused Savage centre engin no. 842 were sold to Mr. and Mrs. Sreeton of Barton-on-Humber. Mrs. Sreeton once told me that by this time there was only a couple of books of music left with the instrument. Fig. 7. This early photograph shows the organ and Savage centre engine mounted to the left of the Gavioli.

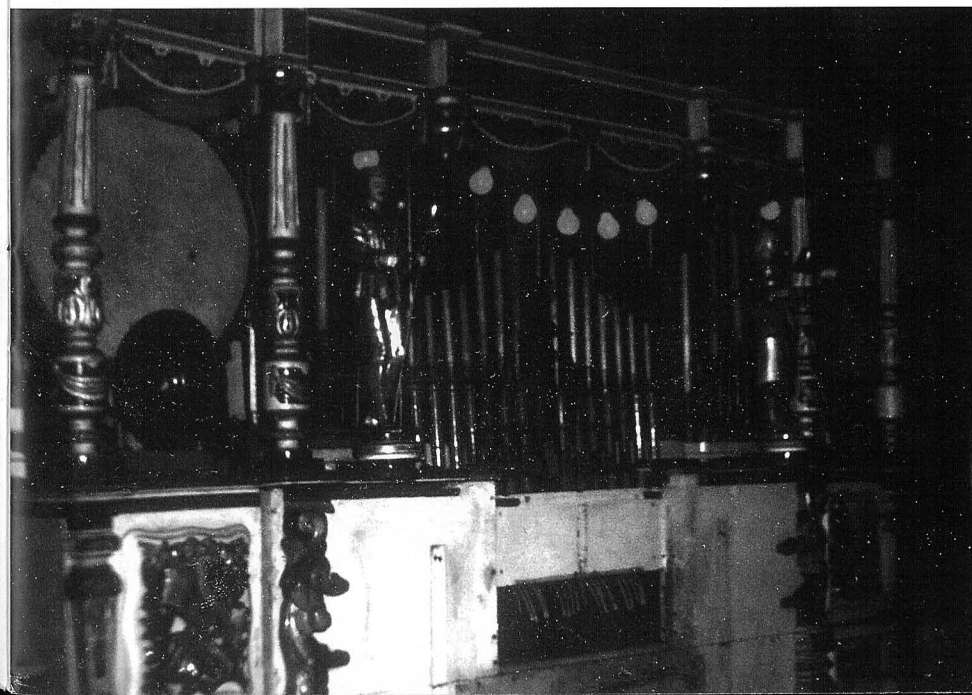


Fig. 6.

Shortly after being purchased, the 'Cleethorpes Gavi', was dismantled and at some point the original case was burned. I understand that organ builder Mr. Peter Hopps commenced with restoration work and the late Mr. James Tiller re-decorated parts of the organ front at his home in Long Sutton. But alas, the project was never completed and the instrument remained stored away in a dismantled state for the next 34 years.

The 3-abreast Gallopers continued to operate inside the 'Wonderland' building and I remember going to see them there in 1976. In 1981 they were purchased by Dr. Pandora Moorhead for the 'Hatherop Castle' girls school in the Cotswolds. I remember this being screened on the 6pm T.V. news. The Gallopers are presently owned by Mr. Jack Schofield of Retford who has been re-building the ride for a number of years. During the spring of 2007, the late Mrs. Screeton's son in law, John Armitage, sold the 'Cleethorpes Gavi' out of showland without any music or the three female figures, to American organ enthusiast Mr. Roger Wiegand of Wayland, Massachusetts.

Mr. Wiegand commissioned the restoration team of mechanical organ builder Mr. Andrew Whitehead, specialist joiner Mr. Brian Wells and Mr. David Heritage to re-build the instrument. A new main case was constructed. Fig 8, as well as new drum sections. During the re-build, and on the new owners instructions, the bottom centre section was built out so that Mr. Wiegand can eventually have a glockenspiel fitted. It will also be noted that some of the Gavioli's pipework has been re-arranged and the baritone pipes moved into the drum sections.

On Tuesday the 14th of August 2007, all the commissioned re-building work had been completed and after tuning and a few minor adjustments, the Gavioli played properly for the first time since leaving Cleethorpes. I was most pleased to be invited down to see and hear my all time favourite 89 key Gavioli once again after supplying photographs, written history and tape recordings of how the organ used to be at Cleethorpes to both Mr. Whitehead and Mr. Wiegand. As I was the only one present that had actually ever heard this organ play before, I was asked if it still sounds as it used to. This was a difficult question to answer as it was playing tunes that I had never heard it play before. After a quick search of Mr. Well's organ truck, I came out with 'Marche Militaire' which I not only remembered having heard the organ play, but also had on tape. As soon as it started to play, I knew the old 'Cleethorpes Gavi' magic was still there.

In writing this article, I must thank all those people who over the years have passed information regarding this instrument on to me. Firstly, my father, Arthur C. Upchurch, the late Eddie Rowbotham, the late Frank Priest, the late Mrs. Screeton, Mr. Karl Plastow, Mr. Ray Elliott and the writings of Kevin Scrivens and Stephen Smith. Special thanks must go to Andrew Whitehead, Brian Wells, David Heritage and Rogerr Wiegand for allowing me to see and hear the 'Cleethorpes Gavi' once more.

When in the States, I understand that two more sections are going to be fitted to the organ and a proscenium fitted. Also, the organ is to be re-christened 'Apollo', but to me it will always be the 'Cleethorpes Gavi'. Fig. 9 shows the re-built instrument

the day before it was loaded into a container, along with new books of music and all bound for the U.S.A.

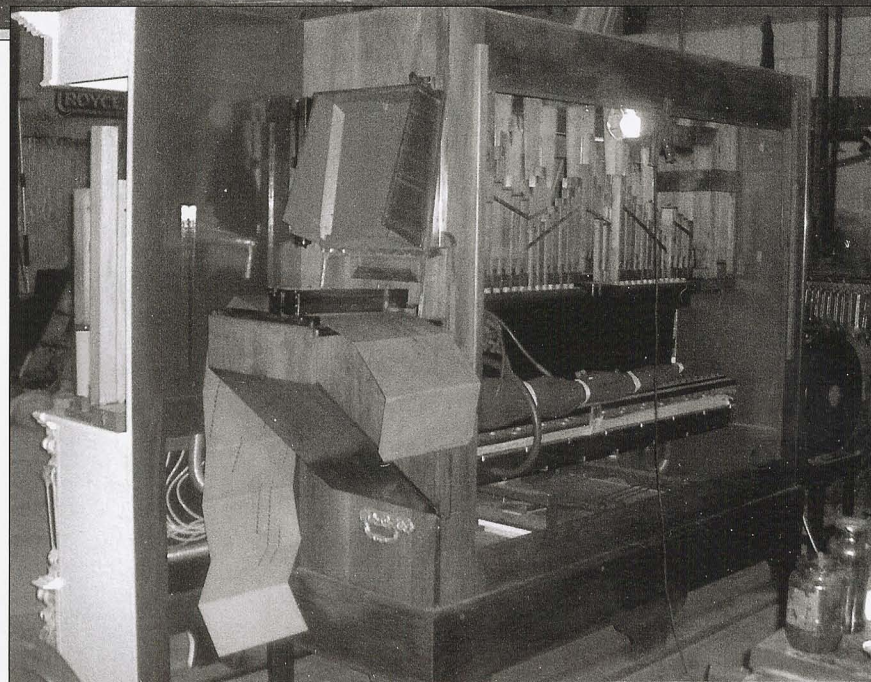
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Once again we see yet another piece of our British fairground heritage being allowed to leave our shores, which brings me back to the title of this article.



above: Fig. 7.

right: Fig. 8.



All photos, from Phillip Upchurch except Fig. 3, David S. Smith collection.

# Before & After

right: Fig 9. The 'Cleethorpes Gavi, the day before it was loaded into a container, along with new books of music for its' journey to the U.S.A.

All photos in this article from Phillip Upchurch.



below: The former 'Cleethorpes Gavi' after the long journey at the premises of its new owner, Roger Wiegand, in Wayland Massachusetts, U.S.A. The facade is at present unfinished and Mr. Wiegand has plans to re-create a new one as near to the original as possible. photo: courtesy Roger Wiegand.

