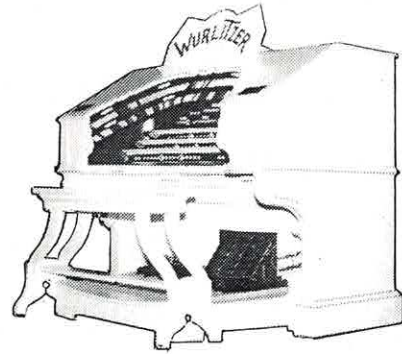
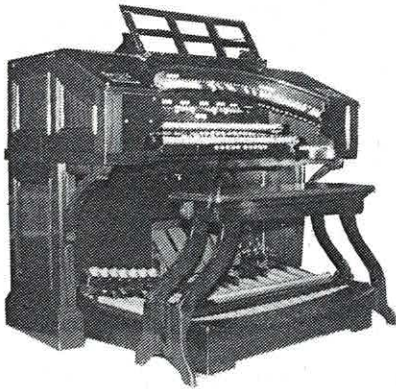


Marrickville Town Hall



Orion Centre Campsie

## NEWS

**THE EVER POPULAR  
TOP LINE AUSTRALIAN MUSICIAN !!!**



# TONY FENELON

in Concert  
at the

**Wurlitzer Theatre Pipe Organ  
in the Orion Centre, Beamish Street, Campsie  
at 2.00pm on Sunday, 9th December, 1990.**



BOOKING FORM  
IN THIS ISSUE



**DON'T FORGET TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
AT 8.00pm ON WEDNESDAY 28th NOVEMBER, 1990 AT MARRICKVILLE TOWN HALL.  
THERE WILL BE IMPORTANT BUSINESS AFFECTING ALL MEMBERS TO BE DISCUSSED.  
(Agenda is included in this issue).**

# TOSA NEWS

NOVEMBER 1990

## THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (N.S.W. DIVISION) Inc.

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&  
Mayor of Canterbury, Ald. John Gorrie

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Phone 985 7318

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Barry Tooker

#### CONCERT RECORDINGS:

Bill Schumacher

#### PROMOTIONS OFFICER:

Kevin Rowland

Please address all correspondence to:

The Secretary  
TOSA (NSW Division) Inc.  
P O Box 87  
MARRICKVILLE NSW 2204

### COMING EVENTS

#### NOVEMBER

Mon. 5 at 7.30pm COMMITTEE MEETING  
Sun. 25 Free Concert advertised  
for Marrickville cancelled  
Wed. 28 at 8.00pm Annual General Meeting  
Marrickville Town Hall.

#### DECEMBER

Mon. 3 at 7.30pm COMMITTEE MEETING  
Sun. 9 at 2.00pm TONY FENELON  
in Concert at Orion  
Centre, CAMPSIE.

- 1991 -

#### JANUARY

Mon. 7 at 7.30pm COMMITTEE MEETING

#### FEBRUARY

Mon. 4 at 7.30pm COMMITTEE MEETING  
Sun. 24 at 2.00pm JOHN ATWELL  
in Concert at Orion  
Centre, CAMPSIE.

#### MARCH

Mon. 4 at 7.30pm COMMITTEE MEETING  
Fri. 29 - Mon. 4 April

#### T.O.S.A. Easter Convention

Fri. 29 at 4.00pm Registration time for  
TOSA Easter Convention  
Marrickville Town Hall  
6.00pm Buffet Dinner  
8.00pm Official Opening  
Sat. 30 at 10.00am Sydney Opera House  
11.00am Lunch-Train-Concert (Epping)  
8.00pm SIMON GLEDHILL  
in Concert at Orion Centre  
11.00pm Stage Supper - Meet Artists  
Sun. 31 at 10.30am EARLY BIRDS CATCH  
the WurliTzer (Open Console)  
Marrickville Town Hall  
11.30am Luncheon at Orpheum  
1.00pm Organ, Dance Band & Me  
Concert - Orpheum, Cremorne  
3.30pm Concert at Mosman Baptist  
Church - Cliff Bingham.  
7.30pm Convention Dinner - 'Meet  
me at the Tower' with Phil  
Kelsall at Orion Centre.  
With Dancing to the WurliTzer

#### APRIL

Mon. 1 at 9.30am SYDNEY HARBOUR CRUISE  
(Circular Quay)  
2.30pm Time for Farewells  
Marrickville Town Hall

Sun. 7 at 2.00pm Phil Kelsall in Concert  
Venue to be confirmed.

Mon. 8 at 7.30pm COMMITTEE MEETING

#### REMEMBER TO TUNE-IN TO 2CBA-FM

EVERY MONDAY NIGHT AT 9.00pm -  
For "Theatre Organ Highlights"

# TOSA NEWS

NOVEMBER 1990

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members who joined the T.O.S.A. ranks recently.

Jack Blades, Gwen Farr-Wharton, Murray Kitson, William Lehman and Donald Sawyer, we hope you will enjoy your time with us.

## THANKS FOR DONATIONS

We would like to thank Judy & Colin Craike and K.R.Beardsmore for their recent donations to T.O.S.A.

Thanks also to Mrs A.Brown who donated back a couple of tickets which she was unable to use at the Orion.

## EXTRACT FROM OCTOBER "VOX" (Following Melbourne Convention)

### "Artist Hippotised!"

On a recent trip to the land downunder, I was privileged to play a concert for the National Convention of the Theatre Organ Society of Australia at Moorabbin Town Hall in Melbourne, Victoria. I had no idea that I would also be privileged enough to meet a beautiful young lady muso from Sydney, who consented to become "Mrs B" during a recent trip to the United States! Andrea Harrison is the young lady's name and since she and I decided we liked the sound of Andrea Bellomy much better, we plan to be married shortly after the first of the year. Since Andrea really enjoyed the Pacific Northwest during her recent visit, and I certainly enjoyed Australia, it is yet to be decided who will be moving.

Dan Bellomy  
Portland, Oregon, USA

## FROM THE TAPE LIBRARY

When borrowing library cassettes, please ensure that they are returned promptly as some are

When borrowing library cassettes, please ensure that they are returned promptly as some are being held for periods up to 6 months or more.

If you are having difficulty in attending concerts, please return tapes by posting to:

304 Parramatta Road  
ASHFIELD NSW 2131

They will easily fit into a Postpak Size #1 padded bag.

## FOR SALE BY TENDER - PIPE ORGAN

### Scots Church, Sydney - Pipe Organ

3 manuals, 48 stops, 18 couplers, Electro-pneumatic action.

Builders: Hill Norman & Beard (Aust.) Pty. Ltd. Built in England 1930.

Organ specification available on request. Tenders for purchase sought - As is/where is.

OFFERS TO: TELEPHONE ENQUIRIES:  
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GPO Box 100  
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R.E.Thorpe - (02) 29 1301

## FOR SALE

HAMMOND 7100 Series - "Cougar"  
2 x 44 note manuals, 13 note pedal board, full set of draw bars for top manual. 2 x combination draw bars for bottom manual, 2 x draw bars for pedal. 2 x presets for top manual (Tibia & String ensemble. Percussion on top manual. Vibrato, acoustic tremolo, basic rhythm unit.

Generally good cond. but needs some repairs (new capacitors) to power supply to remove hum.

CONTACT: **\$750** (or near offer).  
Jim Davey Phone 6pm - 8pm on 416 4185.

HAMMOND ORGAN, Model A105 Tone wheel type with Draw Bars - - - - - Suit a Jazz Player  
2 x 61 note manuals & 25 note pedal board  
Good Condition **\$1500 o.n.o.**  
CONTACT: Mrs Arnold Ph.601 2029 or 602 8683.

HAMMOND PR40 TONE CABINET  
Needs new transformer **\$350 o.n.o.**  
CONTACT: Mrs Arnold Ph. 601 2029 or 602 8683.

HAMMOND Model C3 with PR40 TONE CABINET  
Well cared for and in good working order **\$1200**

CONTACT FOR INSPECTION:  
Stan Riley Business Hours Phone 713 4897.  
After Hours Phone 713 6595.

WURLITZER Model 800  
25 Full length radiating pedals, in-built cassette lesson tapes, bench, show room condition and full working order. **\$3500**

ENQUIRIES:  
Mr S.West Phone - Business 708 4355.  
Private 759 9592.

## BOOK REVIEW

We were requested by Publishers, Oxford University Press to review Peter Hurford's book "Making Music on the Organ".

The following book review has been written by organist David Drury.

**Making Music on the Organ - Peter Hurford.**

A Review by David Drury

Making music on the organ is a book that makes good reading for both the student and the professional. Some chapters are equally interesting for the layperson who is seeking a little more knowledge of the workings of the instrument and the main problems and concerns associated with the playing & interpretation of music on 'The King of Instruments'.

Throughout the book, Hurford is at pains to impart the essence of musicianship needed in communicating the 'music' to the listener when performing on the organ. He likens musical line and phrasing in organ-playing to aspects of singing and string-playing and sets about explaining (in great detail) how to create the illusion of accent and 'ebb & flow' through the use of agogics in touch to achieve the expression necessary that is so much easier in the human voice and other instruments.

The book is well set out, starting with a chapter describing the unique place of the organ in musical culture. Chapter 2 gives a clear idea of the basic construction of the organ with the help of simple and effective drawings. The third chapter describes aspects of posture and inherent physical problems associated with sitting at the organ and how to overcome them.

From here, Hurford gets onto the nitty-gritty of organ touch and its relationship to musical expression (chapters 4 & 5). This would all seem to lead to the focal point of Hurford's interest in the organ - that of the interpretation of the music of J.S.Bach. This is by far the longest and most involved chapter in the book.

A smaller yet effective chapter on the French classical school follows and an even smaller one named 'Renaissance' which attempts to describe briefly what occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries.

At first glance the book would seem to leave many holes, however Hurford himself points out that he has not intended an exhaustive study of all organ styles. He concentrates on the organ of the 17th and 18th centuries because it forms the basis for the instruction of the serious student in what is uniquely the age of the organ and the bulk of its repertoire, before the ideas of the imitation of the orchestra etc.. altered our approach to the use of the instrument.

Though of particular help to the organ student, 'Making music on the organ' is recommended to any musician interested in the study of music-making on an instrument where effective musical expression is so much more difficult (yet rewarding) than almost any other medium.

## LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Dear Mr Lawson,

I am writing to thank you, your committee, and all the members of T.O.S.A. for the really wonderful day you gave me on Sunday 23 September last. Thank you also, for the beautiful sheaf of flowers which you presented to me.

To hear my old organ again after 25 years, was to me, a stunning experience, as well as an emotional one. The console looked beautiful and the organ sounded magnificent indeed. I congratulate the Society on its condition. It gave me a lot of happiness to know the Wurlitzer is so loved and cared for by a Society so obviously dedicated to its preservation.

I would also like to thank Ian and Barbara Somerville for my transport, my friend Merle Webb for all her help and support, Bill Schumacher and Cliff Bingham for their beautiful playing, as well as their choice of music, and my friend Frank Ellis for all the really interesting information he brought out during his interview with me.

I had a wonderful day - my sincere thanks again, and I wish T.O.S.A. all the very best for the future.

Sincerely

Noreen Hennessy

## FRANK SAYS THANK YOU TOSA

I would like to thank all those members who attended the concert at Marrickville Town Hall on Sunday 23rd September. The quite fantastic ovation you gave our guest of honour, Noreen Hennessy touched me very deeply. TOSA - you were all wonderful and I can't thank you enough. Noreen was deeply moved by your warmth, and is still talking to me about her wonderful day.

My thanks to all those who helped to make it such a smoothly running operation - Ian and Barbara Somerville for Noreen's transport, her friend Merle for her day-long attendance on Noreen, Bill and Cliff for their superb musicianship and choice of suitable movie music as befitted the occasion, and Neil Palmer for his dedicated work on our P.E. Wurlitzer. It sounded just great and Noreen was very impressed with it.

This year TOSA is just 30 years old, and, to me, this concert would have to be the highlight of a very special year. Thank you, members, for your response to my appeal for a good roll-up to welcome Noreen Hennessy, despite the football grand final being on the same day. Noreen is a very gracious lady and TOSA did her proud.

Frank Ellis  
Vice-President.

NOVEMBER 1990

REPORT

## THE CONCERT TRIBUTE TO NOREEN HENNESSY.



A STANDING OVATION TO 'MISS PRINCE EDWARD THEATRE HERSELF' - Miss NOREEN HENNESSY!

The concert in Marrickville Town Hall on 23rd. of September presented music that had been featured in films shown at the Prince Edward Theatre, played on the organ that had been in that theatre, and in honour of Noreen Hennessy who was organist there for 19½ years.

The organists chosen to play for the concert were Bill Schumacher and Cliff Bingham, two very experienced organists and both well known to T.O.S.A. members.

Bill Schumacher commenced the programme and in this segment the songs all came from films shown at the Prince Edward - "Beyond the Blue Horizon" (Monte Carlo); "Tangerine" (The Fleet's In); "Moon River" (Breakfast at Tiffany's); "Buttons and Bows" (Pale Face); "I'm in the Mood for Love" (Every Night at Eight); "That Old Black Magic" (Star Spangled Rhythm).

The songs in this bracket were all well suited to Bill Schumacher's style of playing and they were also very well received by the audience. Judging from the applause the most popular ones were "Moon River" and "I'm in the Mood for Love", but he was undoubtedly at his best in "That Old Black Magic".

His playing has style and this was most evident in the finish to each song, when a judicious change in registration gave that last final flourish. This was done particularly well at the ending of "That Old Black Magic".

After the audience applause ended, Bill returned to the console and began playing "Remember Me" and as it was finishing Frank Ellis took up the microphone and said "Remember Me - of course we all remember her" and then turning towards the aisle he said "Miss Prince Edward Theatre herself - our Guest of Honour, Miss Noreen Hennessy".

We looked towards the aisle to see Noreen in a wheel-chair being brought forward by Merle Webb, a close friend who had also been one of the Prince Edward staff when Noreen was the organist.

When they arrived at the front, Frank introduced them to the audience and then began a discussion with Noreen.

We learned that the Prince Edward opened in November 1924 and it featured "The Ten Commandments" which ran for 36 weeks. The theatre policy was to screen long season programmes and it was during another long run film "Standing Room Only" when Noreen commenced on the 18th August in 1944. However, she created the longest run of them all - going till the 21st. of February, 1964.

We also heard that Noreen did a lot of broadcasts, starting in 1945 with a weekly programme at 10 a.m. on Sunday on 2GB. Later she was included in an A.B.C. series when the broadcast was made from different theatres on a rotating basis. This lasted for 12 years.

The most surprising piece of news however was to hear that a very young Bill Schumacher had been helped by Noreen who used to allow him to play the Prince Edward organ on Saturday mornings before the theatre opened. He recalled that one morning Noreen had left him to get on with his playing and after a while he noticed that the theatre doors had opened and the public were now coming in for the 11 a.m. session. He wondered if he should stop and make himself scarce, but he caught sight of Noreen in a doorway nearby making signs for him to keep playing. He looked up at the clock above the console - it was a quarter to eleven and the house was getting quite full. At five to eleven Noreen came and took over. It was

NOVEMBER 1990

## Concert Tribute to Noreen Hennessy - Continued.

Bill's first experience of playing a Wurlitzer to an audience. He values that memory and many others of Noreen Hennessy.

Frank asked Noreen how many times she had played the organ. She said that she didn't know because she had never counted. He said that the organ had been in the theatre for almost 40 years and it was played daily up to the closing date. Noreen had played it for half of that time, twice at each morning, afternoon and evening session, plus practice sessions and broadcasts and Frank assures us that she must have played at least 40,000 times. That organ has been very much a part of her life.

Frank asked "How does the organ sound to you now?" - "Better" said Noreen. Frank replied that the hall has very good acoustics. This is true, but even more important is that a few years back it was completely revoiced by George Stephens, a legendary organ builder from Adelaide, S.A. It has an outstanding sound, Ashley Miller praised it, Lyn Larsen called it "a pet of an organ" and Len Rawle said it is one of the best small Wurlitzers in the world.

As the interview closed, Bill Schumacher began playing "Thanks for the Memory" and the audience all stood and applauded her as Merle Webb took her again to the rear of the hall.

I noticed another Prince Edward person applauding nearby - Clarrie Stuart, who started at the Prince Edward, then later joined the projection team at the Parramatta Roxy, and then later still joined the Kings Cross Theatre. Each one had a theatre organ but he admits he likes the Prince Edward Wurlitzer best.

The music resumed with Cliff Bingham and he commenced with a selection from "The Student Prince", followed by "Under the Double Eagle"; "Mona Lisa"; "The Dambusters March"; "Blaze Away"; "Man of La Mancha"; "Somewhere Out There"; "All Day Monday"; "Mame Selection"; and "The Oxford Street March".

"The Student Prince" and "Mona Lisa" received very good applause, but he was at his best in the two Eric Coates marches, "The Dambusters" and "Oxford Street". Cliff is a long time admirer of Eric Coates music and he has a great feeling and insight for his music. The "Oxford Street" was vintage Eric Coates.

Bill Schumacher returned to the console and in this section gave us "Its Only a Paper Moon"; "Louise"; "Hawaiian Wedding Day"; "Love Me Tonight"; "Isn't It Romantic"; "Moon Over Miami"; "Lover" and for Noreen "Thanks for the Memory" and "Danny Boy".

The audience was not very big and this was almost certainly due to the Rugby League Grand Final being played that afternoon, many staying at home to watch it on T.V.

It was a particularly good concert. Bill and Cliff have never played better. They played for the audience, but I think they played really for Noreen Hennessy, bringing to her on this special occasion the music, and especially the organ that was so much a part of her life. They played really well and obviously enjoyed giving this concert.



BILL SCHUMACHER, CLIFF BINGHAM & FRANK ELLIS GREET NOREEN AS SHE IS WHEELED FORWARD BY HER LONG-TIME FRIEND MERLE WEBB.



We must thank Ian Somerville who thought up the idea of the concert and who also arranged the transport for Noreen and Merle to the hall. Ian Hanson must also be thanked, because it is he who was able to give Frank all the facts and details on the history of The Prince Edward.

When I was leaving I saw at the record bar the Double Cassette of the Hector Olivera Concert given at Marrickville. Geoff Moore from Newcastle is in regular contact with members of the English Cinema Organ Society, and he told me that this cassette received a rave review in the C.O.S. Bulletin which was also equally enthusiastic about the Marrickville organ.

Russell Robertson.

Continued on Page 7.

## Concert Tribute to Noreen Hennessy - Continued.



FRANK ELLIS INTERVIEWING NOREEN  
(With 'her' old WurlitZer in background)



A GREAT DAY FOR ALL CONCERNED!



PRESIDENT JACK LAWSON, MERLE WEBB & FRANK ELLIS  
DRAWING WINNING RAFFLE TICKET.



NOVEMBER 1990

## EDITOR'S COMMENT:

Over the years the story of Robert Hope-Jones and the history of WurliTzer theatre organs has been well documented in earlier issues of TOSA NEWS and the history of the Christie Unit Cinema Organ was detailed in the May 1990 issue of TOSA NEWS.

By courtesy of the U.K. "CINEMA ORGAN" Journal we are now able to publish an article featuring the history of the Compton organ.

Regular contributor [to "Cinema Organ"] Ted Crampton takes another look at the Compton Company, this time through the eyes of former employee and COS member Roy Skinner.

ROY SKINNER - ORGANBUILDER  
and John Compton Organ Co. employee  
1926 - 1960

By Ted Crampton

For over 60 years John Compton built or rebuilt organs large and small, from his 'magnum-opus' dual-purpose instrument of 130 speaking stops and percussions and effects at the City Hall, Kingston-upon-Hull to the little three rank 'Minitura' organs installed in dozens of village churches and chapels. The golden years were, without doubt, the mid 1930's when the Chase Road works in Acton had a production line of half-a-dozen or more cinema organs under construction. Again, in the 1950's, when the restoration and rebuilding of the great church and cathedral organs was under way the firm employed almost 400 craftsmen. These men were loyal employees, who often worked on installations of extreme difficulty, but still gave decades of devoted service to John Compton.

I recently had the great pleasure of meeting one of those long-serving employees - Roy Skinner. Now in his 80's, he's very active and still drives his car around the busy streets. He has a wonderfully alert memory for names, dates and locations and an afternoon spent in his company produced a wealth of anecdotes about one of the principal organ building firms of the century - The John Compton Organ Company Limited.

Roy was born and bred in Nottingham. At the turn of the century John Compton had established his works in Woodborough Road and was installing an organ in a church where the verger was a Mr. Taylor. His schoolboy son James ('Jimmy') used to run errands for the busy organbuilder and in due course he became almost a son to John Compton (who never married). Apprenticed in the art of organ building, he played a vital part in the firm's rapid expansion. John Compton wrote of him later, "For many years past the chief responsibility of this firm has fallen on the ever-willing shoulders of my faithful and affectionate friend and colleague, J.I. Taylor - not only a superb musician, but equally gifted on the mechanical side, where he has invented and put into practice some very ingenious and practical contrivances of stop control . . . . He has never spared himself in time and effort if it is in his power to render service to anybody - proprietors, organists, managers or employees."

Roy's sister was in the choir of that church where John Compton was so busily engaged, and thus from this early friendship with Jimmy, a happy marriage blossomed.



*Roy Skinner relaxes at home.*

Continued on Page 9.



NOVEMBER 1990

## Roy Skinner - Organbuilder

&amp; John Compton Organ Co. employee 1926 - 1960 - Continued.

## Disliked Carpentry

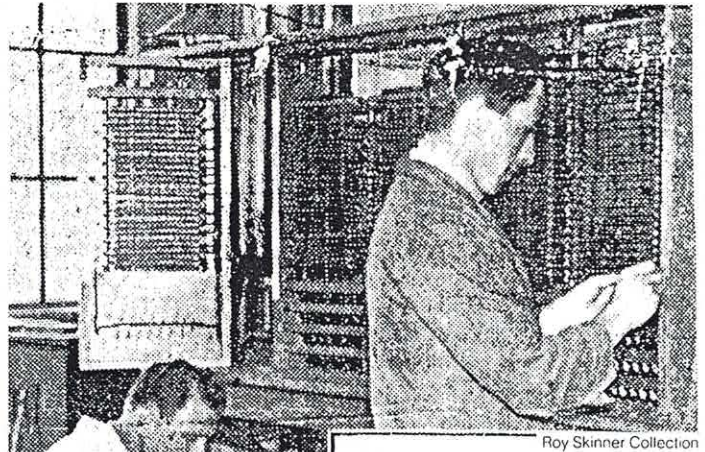
As a schoolboy, Roy can remember being taken round the Lenton works by Jimmy and on leaving school at 14, was invited to become an apprentice there. However, seeing so much woodwork involved - and intensely disliking carpentry himself - he declined and joined Cammell Laird in the city as an engineering apprentice. He then moved to Raleigh and became a motor-cycle tester. In 1920, John Compton moved from Nottingham to Turnham Green, Chiswick and six years later Roy joined the firm there. By then Roy had become very interested in electrics and at that time Comptons had been buying their magnets from small wireless manufacturer Ernest Hurst. They purchased the business and after 3 weeks of making magnet valve seats the repetitiveness soon bored Roy and, as he had no liking for Ernest Hurst, asked to be moved, first to the test board section and cable making, then finally to the installation team.

On his move from Nottingham to Turnham Green, John Compton had purchased the factory of the distinguished Belgian organ builder Auguste Gern. At that time Gern was rebuilding the Annessens organ in the Italian Church of St Peter, Clerkenwell Road, and part of the sale agreement was that John Compton should complete the rebuilding of the organ - "From little acorns large oak trees grow."

The Chiswick organ works soon became a hive of activity. Both John Compton and Jimmy Taylor were forward thinking engineers and a production line of standard components was introduced. Organs could be ordered 'off the peg' - although Jimmy Taylor could quickly evaluate which ranks would be most effective in any location, church or cinema.

When Roy joined Comptons in 1926, cinema organs were beginning to fill the order book. The hard years of the coming industrial depression were beginning to be felt, but for the John Compton Organ Company, the next decade were the golden years and it prospered whilst other industries sank. He was able to build his fine 'straight' organs at little or no profit, subsidised by the ever-increasing rivalry between cinema owners. From their first cinema installation at the County Cinema, Sutton, Surrey in 1921 and their 4/19 organ in the Pavilion, Shepherd's Bush (1923), the orders flowed in, and by World War II some 250 or so had been built. However, John Compton's heart was really in the magnificent church instruments then being built in increasing numbers.

It is fascinating to talk to Roy about those years. He tells how an installation team of two or three men would arrive in a town and hunt for 'digs' - some were excellent, some awful; he was warned never to move into 'digs' with an aspidistra in the window! Next day, the dismantled organ would be delivered in a container from the railway station and a well-established system would proceed with speed - for usually there was an opening date rushing nearer. Roy was a specialist in electrical wiring and many of the test boards and relays of Compton organs are inscribed with his name.



Roy Skinner Collection

Roy Skinner (left), in this 1931 newspaper photograph, is seen wiring Compton relays.

The time to install a standard 6 ranker was about 2 weeks. The speed record was held by the Alma, Luton (2/6) which arrived, was installed and playing in four days! Often they could only work throughout the night, and another quick installation was the Regent Street Polytechnic (2/6), again in just a few days.

Perhaps the most difficult installation that Roy can recall, was the 3c-6 at the Regal, Paisley. As the chamber was only 6'6" high, there was much mitreing of pipes and access to the under-chest magnets was very awkward. The BBC Concert Hall organ was another extremely difficult installation, so much so that other organbuilders just didn't want to know! Roy worked equally on church and cinema organ installations - for they both had the same basic form of construction. Many famous broadcasting organs come readily to his mind. Amongst his favourites were the vast Astoria Theatres in London and he also had a soft spot for the little 3c-5 at the Arts Cinema, Bury - which sounded most effective for its small size.

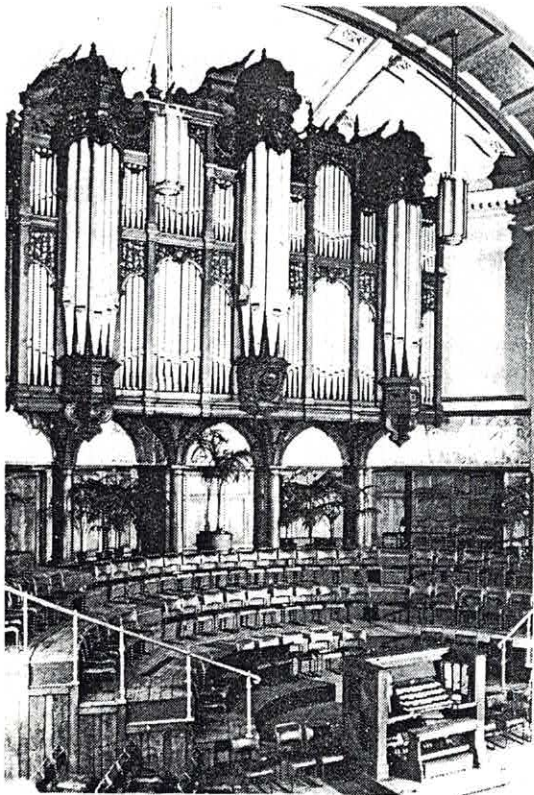
The huge size of the Guildhall, Southampton dual-purpose instrument presented many problems for Roy and his three colleagues. The relays and test boards were so big and heavy that they had to be assembled and wired up in situ. Roy remembers the trouble he had in retrieving a wire-cutter he had dropped down one of the diaphone pipes!

Other memories come flooding back: the panic at the Empire, Aldershot in 1930 when the 15v generator failed on final tuning and a collection of car batteries was hurriedly assembled; luckily, a replacement generator arrived in the nick of time! And talking of replacement - the organ on board ship bound for the Rivoli Cinema, Cairo was destroyed by fire, and another had to be hurriedly assembled and shipped out.

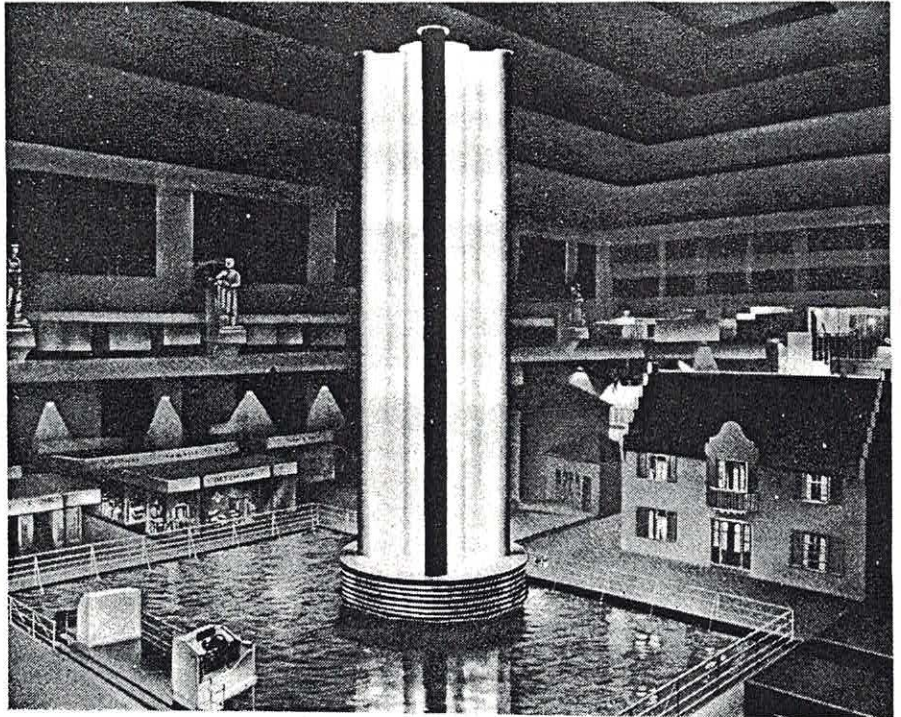
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NOVEMBER 1990

Roy Skinner - Organbuilder  
& John Compton Organ Co. employee 1926 - 1960 - Continued.



The famous Compton rebuild in Hull City Hall.



Two Compton consoles at the 1939 Ideal Home Exhibition. One produced mellifluous Melotone melodies, and the other controlled the lights in the 'Kaleidakon' Tower

Another rush job that Roy recalls is that he and a colleague were instructed to install the 2-5 WurliTzer in the social hall at the MARCO armaments factory in Grantham in 1945. It had been removed from the Decca Recording Studio in West Hampstead and arrived on a Tuesday and was playing on the Saturday night! Wishing to impress everyone, the then local MP, Mr. Kendall, asked Roy to persuade Reginald Dixon to come and 'open' it the following Monday night. Reg was appearing that week at the State, Grantham and Roy had met him during a church organ installation in Blackpool. Roy negotiated with Reg at the State, money changed hands and Reg duly performed the opening concert.

Although some organs were installed in a matter of days, others came out equally as quickly! Roy remembers installing an organ in the Colliseum Cinema in Derby - only to take it out a few days later when the owner defaulted on payment! Almost as quick was the 3-11 installed in the Princes Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue for a show financed by Gracie Fields. The show flopped and the organ was hurriedly removed.

It is interesting to recall that although many concert-type organs were installed in the mansions of the newly-rich in Victorian times, few cinema organs were installed in residences, unlike the situation now. Roy recounts one fascinating tale. He had been working overtime in the Chase Road works and was walking home when he was stopped by a man, his wife and two children. "Where's the organ factory - mate?" he was asked. Roy explained that there was no one there. "That's a pity" said the man, "I've just been to Olympia and ordered my Rolls, and want to order an organ." After initial surprise, Roy quickly 'phoned' Jimmy Taylor

who rushed over to the factory and demonstrated the little demonstration 4-rank cinema organ. The man was a Mr. Tinley from the Birmingham area and from that meeting an 8 rank cinema organ was installed in his home, complete with an Aeolian player attachment - for Mr. Tinley couldn't play a note! I wonder what happened to it?

Another was installed in a house in the West Country and also one in the home of a Mr. Midgley - a director of the CAV car components firm - and who had invested money in Comptons. After Mr. Midgley's death, the organ was dismantled and some was included in the organ in St. Luke's, Chelsea whilst the pipe front was added to the works demonstration church organ of about 20 ranks and on which there were given regular recitals by eminent organists of the era.

Although not involved directly with the production of Compton's electrophonic organs (which was a separate division of the Compton works, under that genius Leslie Bourn) Roy has a brochure of the impressive installation at the 1939 Earls Court Exhibition, where there was a giant glass column with a dazzling array of coloured lighting within and standing in the centre of a lake beside which were two consoles. One was for 'playing' the Strand Electric glass column lighting and the other was a Compton Electrone on which celebrated theatre organists gave accompanying musical interludes. Many standard Compton consoles were used by Strand to control the lighting in theatres and TV studios.

Continued on Page 11.

# TOSA NEWS

NOVEMBER 1990

Roy Skinner - Organbuilder

& John Compton Organ Co. employee 1926 - 1960 - Continued.

Roy could go on for hours reminiscing about the 'old' days - for in the 1950's there was hectic activity. He recalls 'one-off's' - like the electrophonic carillon installed in the centre of Nottingham to celebrate the 1936 Jubilee of King George V - it could be heard for miles! A similar carillon was installed above the Chase Road factory when it was rebuilt after war damage.

John Compton died in April 1957 and his life-long friend, business colleague and successor as Managing Director, 'Jimmy' Taylor died one year later to the day. After that the business lost its sense of direction and a sad situation settled in. An engineering company was formed and amongst its failures was the manufacture of a folding caravan-tent, where the cover was blown up by a foot pump - and this from a firm that made such organs as those in Derby Cathedral and the Odeon, Leicester Square!

### The Final Curtain

The final curtain came down on the John Compton Organ Company Ltd in 1964, when the pipe organ division was sold to Rushworth and Dreaper.

### EDITOR'S FOOTNOTE:

Prior to 1968 Compton theatre organs had not arrived on the Australian scene, however since then that situation has changed and they are currently fairly well represented.

The first to be imported is the ex Gaumont Palace (later re-named Odeon) in Cheltenham, U.K. This is now the property of T.O.S.A. (ACT Division) and is installed in the Albert Hall, Canberra.

Others to arrive here include:

Ex Ritz Cinema, Warrington, U.K. This is now owned by T.O.S.A. (Western Victorian Division) and is installed in Her Majesty's (formerly Memorial) Theatre, Ballarat, Victoria.

The electrophonic organs continued to be built until 1967, when that section, too, was finally sold off.

Roy had become disenchanted with the running of the firm and left in 1960 and joined the electronics firm Ultra, where he worked on technical leaflets. He finally retired when he was 70 and now enjoys life, in the company of his charming wife, daughter, son and grandchildren. After he left Comptons, he completely abandoned his interest in organs - something he now regrets - and would dearly love to visit some of the organs he worked on all those years ago.

He also has time to reflect on the glories of yesteryear and some of the wonderful organs built by the firm with whom he spent 34 years. He also remembers the magnificent instruments that came from the Compton factory near his home - Downside Abbey, St. Bride's Fleet Street, Wolverhampton Civic Hall, St. George's Hall London and so many others. That so many of them are playing happily today is a tribute to the skill and workmanship of Roy Skinner, his friends and fellow-workers at the John Compton Organ Company.

Ex Plaza Cinema, Worthing, Sussex, now owned by T.O.S.A. (WA Division) and is installed in the John Leckie Music Centre, Nedlands, Perth.

A composite instrument is being assembled from components obtained from various Compton organs around Gt. Britain and the Victorian Division of T.O.S.A. are currently installing it in the Malvern Town Hall, Melbourne.

There are also two privately owned Compton organs, one in Brisbane, Queensland and the other in Liverpool, N.S.W.

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# TOSA NEWS

NOVEMBER 1990

From "Puget Sound Pipeline"

## ORGANS TO ASHES ... A TERRIBLE TOLL!

Unsolved fires in the greater Seattle area from the late 30's through the 40's and 50's and even into the early 60's took a terrible toll of theatre organs, as well as their venues.

Let's begin with the Garden of Allah Club in Seattle, with its 2/5 WurliTzer from the Majestic Theatre in Eugene, Oregon, which was destroyed by fire in 1939.

The 2/9 WurliTzer from the Capitol Theatre in Yakima, Opus 389, 1921, had just been moved and re-installed in 1941 when a fire destroyed everything at the Tacoma Rollerbowl.

Then in 1942, The Diamond Horseshoe Club in Seattle along with its 2/4 WurliTzer burned to the ground.

The Ridge Rink, in Seattle lost its 2/8 WurliTzer in 1945 due to a very destructive fire. This WurliTzer was from the Seattle Wintergarden Theatre. The building did survive and a replacement organ was installed, also a 2/8 WurliTzer, made up from parts.

In 1945, a fire totally destroyed the Redondo Skating Rink, between Seattle and Tacoma, with its 4/10 Robert Morton from Warner Brothers Theatre in Los Angeles.

The Rollerland Skating Rink in Renton, along with its 4/18 Robert Morton from the Seattle Pantages/Palomar, went up in fire and smoke in 1962.

These losses were tremendous enough, but in addition there was a series of five fires, all involving large amusement facilities, in the early 50's.

In September of 1950, The Shady Beach Dance Pavillion was totally destroyed by fire. Then two months later, on December 16th, 1950, the Palladium Ballroom was reduced to ashes. Two weeks later, on December 31st, 1950, The Aurora Stadium Speedway was a total loss - fire again. Three weeks later, on January 20th, 1951, the Redondo Amusement Centre was destroyed by fire.

Three and a half months later on May 6th, 1951, the most disastrous of all the amusement facility fires totally destroyed the Seattle Roller Bowl including FOUR theatre organs.

The Roller Bowl building was inspected at 5 a.m. on the ill-fated Sunday morning by the Caretaker, and all was well. A merchant patrolman shortly thereafter turned in the fire alarm at 5.45 a.m. The fire started in the rear living quarters of the large building and spread very rapidly. It was impossible with the fire investigative procedures in 1951, to determine the cause.

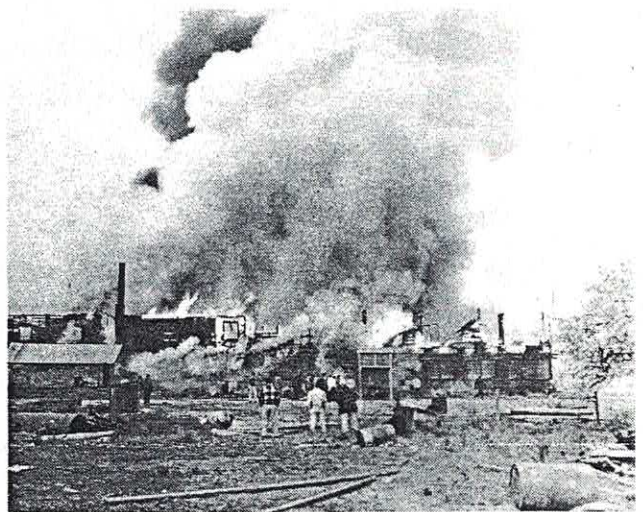
The building burned for four hours while 50 firemen and 9 fire engines struggled to put the fire out. Flames were leaping 100 feet in the air while nearby roofs were scorched and several windows exploded in the neighbourhood due to the severe heat.

Damage to the Rollerbowl was total. Don Isham, the resident rink organist, was quoted as saying, "I can't begin to get it in my mind how much has been lost". Later he said wistfully "I hope it's rebuilt". Owners of amusement facilities in the area had been warned by the fire marshall about possible arson - yet none of these five large fires were eventually attributed to arson.

The theatre pipe organ playing for skating sessions in the Rollerbowl in May of 1951 was the 2/9 Special WurliTzer from the Spokane Liberty Theatre. This was WurliTzer Opus 50, shipped November 28th, 1914, only four months after the famous Seattle Liberty WurliTzer, Opus 41, was shipped on July 29th, 1914. In 1937, the Spokane Liberty WurliTzer was moved to the Rollerbowl and enlarged to 14 sets, with the addition of a 3 manual Morton console from radio station KSTP. This instrument was a total loss.

Stored in the basement of the Rollerbowl was the 3/9 WurliTzer Special, Opus 1585, 1927. This instrument was shipped to the Bagdad Theatre, later renamed the Ballard. The organ, having been purchased and removed by Ivan Ditmar for installation in his Hollywood home, was a total loss.

Located also in the basement of the Rollerbowl was Northwest Recording Studio, and in the studio was WurliTzer Opus 341, 1920, a 2/8 from the Weir Theatre in Aberdeen, Washington. This instrument had been enlarged to nine sets and was being played from a beautiful ebony three manual Kimball console from Radio Station WGN in Chicago. The only portion of this organ to survive the fire was part of the Kimball console.



*The early Sunday morning fire was seen over much of North-Central Seattle as the Rollerbowl was engulfed in flames.*

Continued on Page 13.

# TOSA NEWS

NOVEMBER 1990

## ORGANS TO ASHES ...

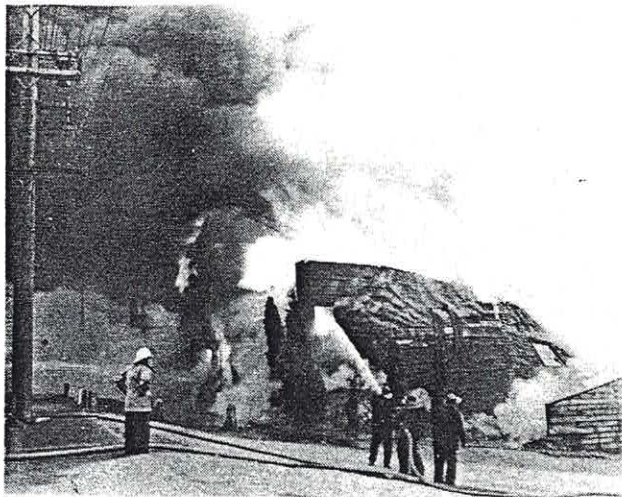
A TERRIBLE TOLL! - Continued.

In addition to the terrible loss of organs in the Rollerbowl, there was a very complete functioning machine shop also in the basement, plus assorted organ parts including several spare organ consoles, plus a large shipment for Don Isham of brand new still crated pipes from Organ Supply.

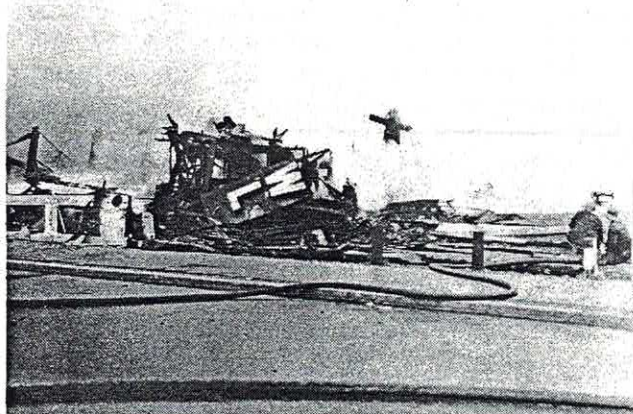
Again all was lost.

NOTE: Readers will be interested to know the Editors for the Puget Sound Pipeline are Russ & Jo Ann Evans who have visited our shores for T.O.S.A. Conventions. Russ has also further depleted the stocks of organ parts in the States by sending a number of consignments out to us. He has been a wonderful source of supply and hope he will be able to make it for the next Easter Convention.

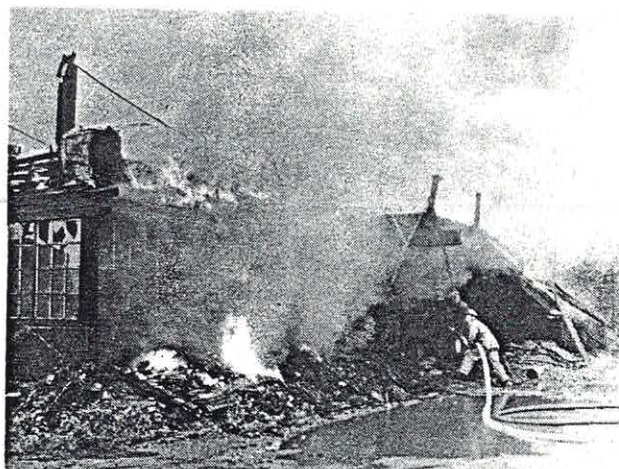
Russ and Jo Ann are always most welcome.



Flames shot 100 feet into the air and burned four hours.



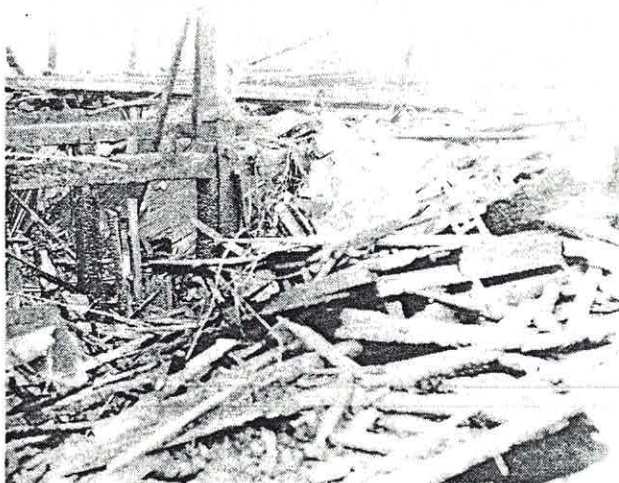
Near total destruction, only "W" & "L" remained of the landmark ROLLERBOWL sign.



The stubborn blaze was battled by 50 firemen from 5 volunteer depts.



The remains of one of the many blowers stands in silence.



Four beautiful theatre organs are but a memory following this tremendous loss.

## Tony Fenelon - Profile

Tony Fenelon was born on 9th January 1941, in Melbourne. He commenced his piano tuition at the age of 7 and was playing competently in Eisteddfods and local Festivals when he was 8. His first win was at Hughesdale and he has had particular success at Dandenong where he won major prizes every year until his early 20's including the Australian Pianoforte Scholarship in 1959.

In 1961 at age 20, he was the outstanding winner of both the Open and Bach sections of the Australian National Eisteddfod held in Canberra in the Albert Hall. In 1963 he was the Victorian State winner of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Concerto and Vocal Competitions. Along the way, Tony had completed a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Melbourne in 1963, as well as his Associate Diploma and achieved the highest marks ever awarded for Licentiate Diploma at Melbourne's Conservatorium of Music under famed pianist and teacher, Roy Shepherd.

At Christmas 1964, another interest of Tony's came to the fore. Having always had a love for the Theatre Organ, Tony was invited to perform a feature spot in a special programme being presented at Melbourne's Regent Theatre. As a result of his outstanding performance, he became the resident organist at the Regent until it closed down in 1969.

Through this early period, Tony was also invited to play at several locations on Theatre Organs throughout Australia by the rapidly growing Theatre Organ Societies.

A great highlight of his career came in 1969 with his first visit to the USA for a concert tour and one which resulted in return tours totaling 8 in all. His most recent USA tour was early this year with well known American organist, Lyn Larsen. This highly successful tour was widely acclaimed by all who attended.

He has also performed in the UK at several venues including an invitation to perform for the Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust in an exclusive concert at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester in July, 1980. Tony has just recently returned from another very successful concert season in the UK.

Tony has released 15 record albums in various countries and has the distinction of being awarded 4 gold records for one of his albums recorded at the Regent, Melbourne Wurlitzer.

Music is Tony's love, but not his full time profession. In every day life he is a bio-medical scientist - designing and maintaining the highly sophisticated life support systems and complicated equipment of modern hospitals.

For leisure (when he finds time), Tony is an accomplished and enthusiastic glider pilot.

A man of great versatility, Tony's dedication, energy, musical genius and personality make him an artist of constant demand throughout the world.