

A 89-key Pierre Eich Fairground Organ

James Reid

Built around 1906 by Pierre Eich of Ghent, Belgium, this is probably the only one of this kind of instrument still in existence today (**Figure 1**).

It is thought that this organ contains parts from a 108-key Gavioli barrel organ that sank, whilst being transported by barge in Holland.

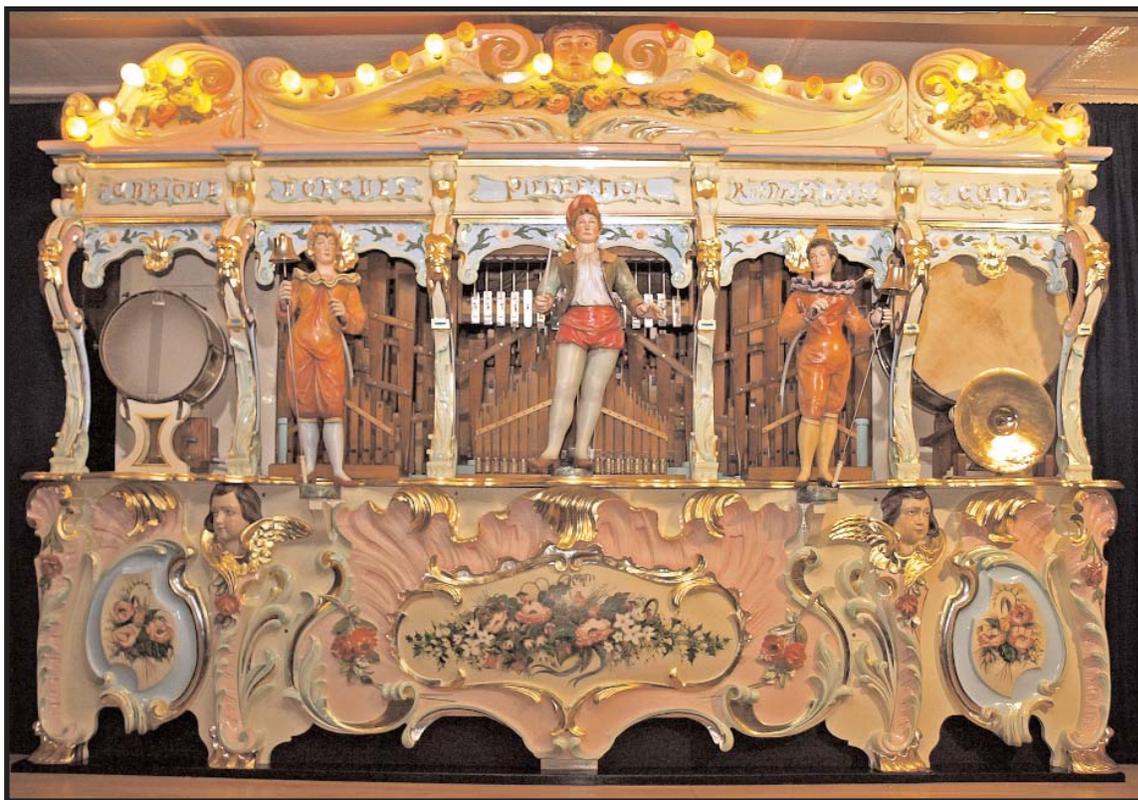


Figure 1. The 89-key Pierre Eich fairground organ after complete restoration.

Photo: Keith Pritchett.

Pierre Eich was not solely focused on the manufacture of fairground organs, but rather player pianos, orchestrions and in more recent year's even pneumatic jukeboxes.

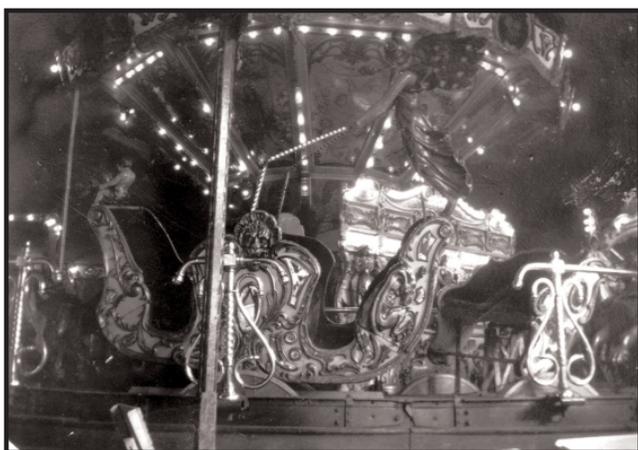


Figure 2. The Pierre Eich organ standing in the background.

During its working life, all of which was in Holland, the organ was fitted in a Salon Carousel (a carousel inside a tent) and travelled by the Schildmeyer family and later the Siphkema Family (**Figure's 2 & 3**). After a number of years in this attraction, the organ was paired up with a set of dodgem cars and used until 1964 when it was bought by W. J. Barlow who imported it into this country and then by Anthony Beaver. After about a year, the organ was then bought by L. W. and J. Cole of Leeds who mounted it on an early Reo wagon, and travelled the organ, often accompanied by the Trevor Barow's Gaiety Girls and Groves' Bioscope Show. After the Cole brothers stopped travelling the organ, it was bought by George Dyson, Harrogate who travelled the organ for a number of years until his death when it passed to Graham Munnerly of Liverpool. It was purchased by us in 2001.

When we acquired the organ, it was completely dismantled and in very poor condition. Peter Griffiths was set to work making a new case, reservoir and bringing the organ back into playing condition. Since then, further cosmetic work has been done by the owners as well as work to the organs action case and wiring.

In 2007, the front carvings were removed and taken to A.C. Pilmer, Automatic Music Ltd for painting. The gilding and paintwork were carried out by Glyn Harvey and all the artwork, faces and figures by Briony Hallas. This style of organ facade is unique only to Pierre Eich organs having been carved by a local man, Moulin Asse, who was located in Sint Amandsberg, a suburb of Ghent. This factory supplied different types of carving including fairground attractions such as carousel horses and also had ties with the company Hooghuys.

The facade on this organ is thought to have been much bigger when new, with a much higher top (some of which can be seen in the pictures) and an extra pair of stands, one either side of the organ.

There is an extensive music library, including old and new arrangements by Carl Frei, A. Schollert, Limonaire, Louis Blache, Tom Meijer, Jan kees de Ruijter, Jeroen van Baden and many others, English and



Figure 3. The Sijkema family Pierre Eich organ with circling horses.

European. This gives the organ a very large repertoire, playing overtures, marches and popular songs, dating from the early 1920s up until the present day.

The organ is now travelled all over England by my father, Andrew and me with our 1961 built Scammell Highwayman ballast tractor and showman's living wagon (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The 89-key Pierre Eich organ is transported in a 1961 Scammell Highwayman tractor rig. Photo: Keith Pritchett

As well as the pictures that accompany this article, there are several videos of the organ playing and our road train in motion on our you tube channel which can be found at www.youtube.com/pierreeich.

My interest in mechanical music started at a very age as my father bought a van Steenput fairground organ when I was just three years old. Since then, my interest has grown and I am now a professional music book cutter and organ repairer.