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The Bassoon: Its Origin and Evolution

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THE REV. CANON F. W. GALPIN, LITT.D., F.L.S.,
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THE BASSOON: ITS ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION.

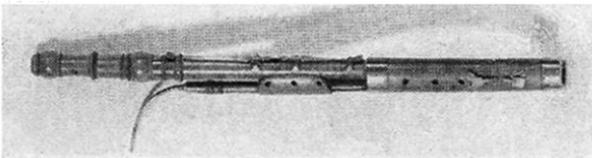
BY LYNDESAY G. LANGWILL.

It must seem remarkable that a perusal of the subjects of the many papers read before this Association, since its foundation in 1874, discloses the fact that the bassoon has never received special attention. I cannot claim to address you as a professional performer, but as an amateur musician who, since childhood, has been fascinated by the bassoon. Indeed, I believe I am devoted to it much more than if it were the means of my livelihood. It has been my experience to find that musical people know little or nothing about the origin and evolution of the bassoon. Even bassoonists know little of that aspect, and I regret to say that one accomplished performer of my acquaintance, when asked if he was interested in the history of the bassoon, replied that he was more interested in its future than in its past! For the past eight years I have collected all available information at home and abroad, including photographs of surviving specimens of all ages and with the help of a selection of slides from these photographs, I hope to be able to give a very brief historical résumé.

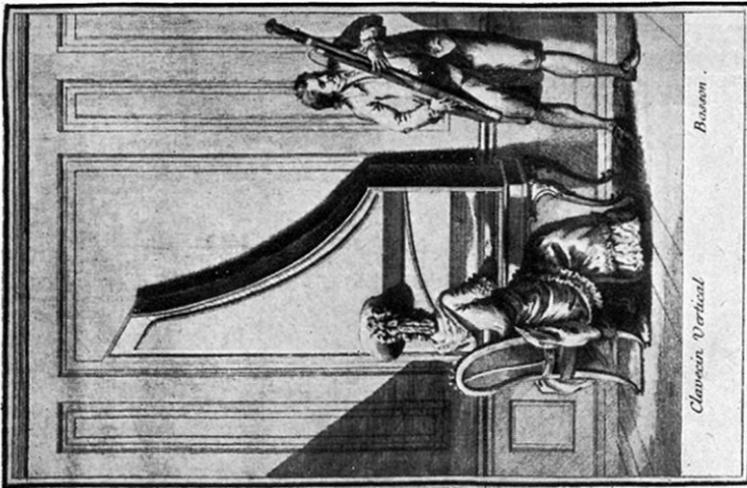
The Bassoon is the bass of the Oboe family only in name. In construction, it differs radically from the oboe and its tone-quality is peculiar to itself. The word BASSOON has not been in use in English for much more than two centuries. It occurs first, so far as I can discover, in 1706 in Phillips's *New World of Words*.¹ Until then, and, indeed, until about 1750, the instrument was known as the Curtall (or Double Curtall) and the earliest recorded use of this word for the instrument in English appears to be in 1574 when it occurs in the Household Accounts of Sir Thomas Kytson in Suffolk.² In 1575, the Double Curtall is mentioned as a

¹ E. Phillips, *The New World of Words*. 6th Edit. (London, 1706).

² J. Gage, *History and Antiquities of Hengrave in Suffolk* (London, 1822), p. 204.

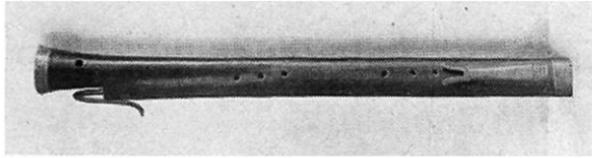


3-Keyed Fagottino by I. C. Denner, Nürnberg, c. 1700. Height: 1' 10". (In Fine Arts Museum, Boston, Mass.)



1780.

Plate in *Essai sur la Musique* by J. B. de Laborde, (Paris, 1780).



3-Keyed Dulzian. Height 98cm. (see footnote 19, p. 5). In Museum der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna.

component of the Waits Band of Exeter,³ and c. 1582 Stephen Batman included it with the oboe and bagpipes as "common bleting musicke." In 1597, the Chamberlain of the Corporation of London was ordered to provide a curtall for the musicians at the charge of the city.⁴

The origin of the Bassoon is, and probably will remain, a mystery. All we can affirm is that no such instrumental type is mentioned in Virdung (1511)⁵ Agricola (1528 and 1545)⁶ or Luscinius (1536).⁷ It is probable that the device of using two parallel channels connected in U-shape to form a continuous sound column can be attributed to Canon Afranio of Ferrara who before 1521 was experimenting with an instrument termed "Phagotum" embodying two such U-tubes. Improved sufficiently to be played at a banquet in 1532, the Phagotum was depicted and described by Afranio's nephew in 1539,⁸ and in some MS. instructions of 1565 each tube is termed a "fagotto."⁹ It is quite incorrect, however, to attribute the invention of the bassoon to Afranio, as almost every work of reference has done until in recent years. The Phagotum had bellows, single reeds of metal and twin U-tubes with cylindrical bore. The bassoon, with its double reed of cane, consists of one continuous U-shaped tube with conical bore. Canon Galpin has dealt very fully with the Phagotum in *Grove* (1927) and Cecil Forsyth has an article in somewhat humorous vein—as an Appendix to his *Orchestration*.

Contrabass instruments called "Fagotes" are mentioned in 1555 in a Spanish catalogue of instruments belonging to the Flemish band of Marie de Hongrie,¹⁰ but unfortunately we have no information as to the nature of these "Fagotes."

In 1596, Zacconi's *Prattica di Musica* mentions one type of bassoon, the *Fagotto Chorista*, with a compass of

³ *Description of Exeter*, by John Vowell, alias Hoker (Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1919) and *History of Exeter Guildhall*, by H. Lloyd Parry (Exeter, 1936), p. 159.

⁴ *Musical News*, 7th August, 1915. F. A. Hadland, "The Waits."

⁵ S. Virdung, *Musica getutscht und ausgezogen* (Basel, 1511, facsimile 1931).

⁶ M. Agricola, *Musica instrumentalis deudsch* (Wittenberg 1529, new edition 1896).

⁷ O. Luscinius, *Musurgia seu Praxis Musical . . .* (Strasburg, 1536).

⁸ Teseo Albonesi, *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam* (1539).

⁹ L. F. Valdrighi, *Musurgiana*, Series I, No. 4 and II, No. 2 (Modena, 1879).

¹⁰ E. van der Straeten, *Hist. de la Mus. aux Pays-Bas*, vol. vii, pp. 433, 436, 448.

two octaves less a tone from C below the bass.¹¹ The name suggests that the primitive bassoon was at once regarded as peculiarly adapted for supporting the voices in church—a use to which the instrument was put in England down to the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

In 1619 Praetorius's monumental work *Syntagma Musicum* depicted five types of Fagotte.¹² From his *De Organographia* the compass tables enable us to make this comparison of (1) Shalmeyes and Pommers—the immediate precursors of Oboe and Bassoon, (2) Fagotte, each type below the corresponding member (if any) of the other family, and (3) the modern survivals.

I would remark that :—

1. Gross Bass Pommer gave place ultimately to the Doppel Fagott and the modern Contrabassoon.
2. Bass Pommer to the Chorist Fagott or Dulzian and the modern bassoon.
5. Alt Pommer to the Oboe da Caccia and the modern Cor Anglais.
6. The Schalmey to the modern Oboe.

Between 2 and 5 has developed the Heckelphone, really a Baritone Oboe and between 5 and 6 the Oboe d'amore. In No. 1 note that in both Pommers and Fagotte the lowest note was Contra F, and in No. 2 in both cases C. The Fagott of that early date had already the upward limit of g' which was not exceeded until after Mozart. I have brought for your inspection a set of six modern German double reeds as used on the Oboe, Oboe d'amore, Cor Anglais, Heckelphone, Bassoon and Contra Bassoon.

The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were remarkable for the large instrumental families employed. Praetorius details the composition of an Accort or Stimmwerk—eighty-six wind instruments of nine distinct kinds (Sorte or Art), including thirteen Pommers and eight Fagotte.

A group of six wind musicians represented in a painting preserved in Madrid, are shown taking part in a

¹¹ L. Zacconi, *Prattica di Musica*, Ven. 1596, Book IV, f. 218. L. F. Valdrighi, *Cappelle, concerti e musiche di casa d'Este*, 1884, p. 48.

¹² M. Praetorius, *Syntagmatis musici* . . . Tomus Secundus. *De Organographia* (Wolfenbüttel, 1619, facsimile 1929). And *id. Theatrum Instrumentorum* (Wolfenbüttel 1620, facsimile 1929).

religious procession in Antwerp in 1616.¹³ From left to right they are playing: A Dulzian or Chorist Fagott (which is being played left-handed, i.e. right hand above left), Alto Pommer, Cornetto, Discant Schalmey, Alto Pommer and Trombone. It is significant that a Discant Schalmey and two Alto Pommers have as a bass—not a Bass Pommer—but a Dulzian. This is not surprising when one considers the inconvenience of handling the Bass Pommer, six feet long; or the gigantic Gross Bass Pommer, ten feet long.

There is an engraving of Nikol Rosenkron¹⁴ who came to Nürnberg in 1679, accompanied by his young son and gained a great reputation as a Gross Bass Pommer player. Gerber¹⁵ in his *Lexikon* of 1792 describes Rosenkron as a "Fagott" player. In the same way, I am convinced that Doppelmayr¹⁶ in his *Historische Nachricht* of 1730, describing Sigmund Schnitzer (d. 1578) as a celebrated maker of extraordinarily large "Fagotte," was referring to Bass Pommers.

A Dulzian player appears on the right of a group of musicians around the organ on this frontispiece of Praetorius's *Theatrum Instrumentorum* of 1620, and the same work contains plates of two-keyed Dulzians and a Gross Doppel Quint Pommer with its four long keys.

Although Dulzians were so named—from *dolce*—because in comparison with the Pommers they were so much softer in tone, they were sometimes muted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by having, over the bell, a perforated cap like an enlarged pepper-pot. This cap (Ger., *Schallkapsel*) is present on several of these Dulzians in the famous Heyer Collection formerly at Cöln, and now at Leipzig.¹⁷ Dulzians were termed "offen" or "gedackt" according to the absence or presence of a *Schallkapsel*.

¹³ Reproduced in Mahillon, *Catal. du Musée Instr. de Bruxelles*, vol. II (Gand, 1909), p. 25, from a picture by Van Alslot painted in 1616, now in the National Gallery of Painting and Sculpture in Madrid: "La procession de tous les ordres religieux de la ville d'Anvers le jour de la fête de la Vierge du Rosaire."

¹⁴ *Musical Times*, August, 1938: "A 17th Century Wood-wind Curiosity," by L. G. Langwill.

¹⁵ E. L. Gerber, *Historisch-Biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler* (Leipzig, 1790-92).

¹⁶ J. G. Doppelmayr, *Historische Nachricht von den Nürnbergischen Künstlern . . .*, p. 293 (Nürnberg, 1730).

¹⁷ Heyer—*Leipzig Catal.* Nos. 1356, 1357, 1358, 1360, 1359, 1361.

From right to left they are :—

- No. 1356. Alt Dulzian (lowest note c in bass).
 No. 1357. Offen Bassett or Tenor Dulzian (lowest note G).
 No. 1358. Gedackt Bassett or Tenor Dulzian (lowest note G).
 No. 1360. Gedackt Chorist Fagott or Bass Dulzian (lowest note C below bass stave).

(This last instrument is of special interest being the work of Joh. Christ. Denner, Nürnberg, the reputed inventor of the clarinet, c. 1690.)

No. 1359 is an offen Chorist Fagott or Bass Dulzian (lowest note C below bass stave) and lastly, a Doppel Fagott or Grosser Bass Dulzian (lowest note Contra F).

In the Museum of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna,¹⁸ may be seen these two Dulzians and a Rankett, Rackett (Ger. *ranke*=crooked), or Sausage Bassoon. The last is also by J. C. Denner and is dated 1709. One of the Dulzians (No. 117)¹⁹ bears the following quaint verse around the bell and seems to show that the Dulzian, even in its heyday, was not in very general use :—

Der Dulcin bin ich genant
 Nit einem jedem wol pekât
 Der mich wil recht pfeifen
 Der mus mich wol lernê greifen.

In the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, are three sixteenth or seventeenth century Dulzians,²⁰ unique since they illustrate :²¹ (1) the one-piece type—two channels bored in one stock ; (2) the two-piece type found convenient when a long channel rendered boring a practical difficulty, and (3) the three-piece type, when the “ wing ” and “ long-joint ” became separate pieces. The addition of a fourth or “ bell-joint ” to this last type brought about the modern Bassoon construction.

It is difficult to say at what point in the seventeenth century the transformation from Dulzian to Bassoon took place. In Mersenne's *Harmonie Universelle* (1636),²² the three-keyed Dulzian is designated “ Fagot ou Basson,” but is still a Dulzian in essence.

¹⁸ Catalogue of the Museum of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien (1912), pp. 166–167 ; and 170, Nos. 117, 118 and 173.

¹⁹ Facsimile described and illustrated as No. 994 in Mahillon, *Catal. du Musée . . . de Bruxelles*, vol. II, pp. 266–7. Cp. also Day's *Catal. R. M. Exhib.*, No. 149.

²⁰ Schlosser's *Catal.*, Nos. 195, 199 and 201.

²¹ *Musical Times*, April, 1937: “The Curtall (1550-1750)”, by L. G. Langwill.

²² M. Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle* (Paris, 1636).

Circa 1688, Randle Holme in a manuscript work on heraldry, made a drawing and description²³ of the English Double Curtaile, and this provides valuable evidence that the Dulzian had, since 1636, acquired a separate wing-joint for the left hand, and a bell-joint. The MS. states that the instrument had three keys, D and F of the Dulzian, and Contra B \flat .

The earliest occurrence I have found of this note is in an exercise published at Venice in 1638 in the form of variations for Fagotto solo with Basso continuo, by a monk Fray Bartolomé de Selma y Salaverde.²⁴ The variations demand a very high degree of technique and are evidence that the development of the bassoon at this time may have been taking place in Italy.

From the year 1698 we have a woodcut by Christoff Weigel, of Nürnberg,²⁵ giving remarkable evidence of the transition period from Dulzian to Bassoon. The Bassoon-maker is at work boring the finger-holes of a Dulzian while on the floor beside him lies another Dulzian. Leaning against his bench, however, is a three-keyed bassoon of transitional form. Another drawing²⁶ by Weigel of the same date shows a left-handed bassoon-player with an instrument like that leaning on the bench in the woodcut. I venture to suggest, therefore, that the Bassoon assumed much of its present form in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The two-keyed Dulzian, for which Daniel Speer²⁷ published a fingering chart in 1697, was no longer in fashion in 1738 according to Eisel²⁸ who gave fingering charts for it (calling it Teutsche Basson) and for the four-keyed bassoon. Mattheson²⁹ in 1713 describes "der stolze Basson" giving it a compass from C below the bass to f or g in the treble stave, adding that occasionally Contra B \flat and A are found. Majer³⁰ (1732 and 1741) shows the three-keyed

²³ Brit Mus. MS. Harl. 2034, f. 207 b.

²⁴ Lavignac, *Encyclopédie de la Mus.*, Art. "La Musique en Espagne," by R. Mitjana, pp. 2085-7.

²⁵ *Gemein-nützlichen Hauptstände* (1698) reproduced in *Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft* (Potsdam, 1929), p. 33; also in *Der Fagott*, by W. H. Heckel (Leipzig, 1931), p. 44.

²⁶ *Musikalisches Theatrum: Farbige Stiche*, by Joh. Christ. Weigel, reproduced in *Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft* (Potsdam, 1929), p. 51.

²⁷ D. Speer, *Grundrichtiger Unterricht . . .* (Ulm, 1687; 2nd edit., 1697).

²⁸ J. T. Eisel, *Musicus autodidactus* (Erfurt, 1738).

²⁹ Johann Mattheson, *Das neu-eröffnete Orchester* (Hamburg, 1713).

³⁰ J. F. B. C. Majer, *Neu-eröffneter . . . Music-Saal* (1732; 2nd edit., Nürnberg, 1741).

type described in Walther's³¹ *Lexikon* of 1732, but by 1738 Eisel, as stated, showed the four-keyed bassoon to be standard.

An interesting Address Card³² of *circa* 1705 is that of Coenraad Rykel, master flute maker, who was born in Amsterdam in 1667, and was a nephew of and apprenticed in 1679 to Richard Haka, wood-wind maker. Rykel later became Haka's partner until the latter's death *c.* 1705. The bassoon shown has clearly four keys.

The fourth key (G#) certainly dates from about 1700, and accordingly much earlier than 1751, the date frequently stated—merely because the four-keyed type is depicted in this plate in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*³³ which appeared in Paris from 1751 onwards.

The addition of the fifth and sixth (closed) keys was almost simultaneous. It is probable that low E \flat (for left thumb on French and English bassoons and for left little finger on the German type) was the earlier of the two keys. It appears in Paris fingering charts of Abrahame,³⁴ and Laborde,³⁵ both *circa* 1780. In my collection of photographs of over 360 bassoons in public and private collections throughout the world, there is only one instance of a five-keyed bassoon with F# as the fifth key and it is clearly a later addition. The six-keyed bassoon was standard towards the close of the century.

The earliest reference to an orchestral bassoon-player appears to be in 1578 when Philip van Ranst was appointed Court Fagottist at Brussels.³⁶ Three years later a fagotto was included in the orchestra for a ballet composed for the marriage of Margaret of Lorraine.³⁷ German Inventars mention a "Dultzian" at Brandenburg in 1580,³⁸ "Dolzoni" at Dresden in 1593,³⁹ and Discant, Tenor and

³¹ J. G. Walther, *Musikalisches Lexikon* (Leipzig, 1732).

³² Frontispiece to *Musical Wind Instruments*, by Adam Carse (London, 1939).

³³ Diderot and D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie méthodique*. Plate: Lutherie (Paris, 1751-72).

³⁴ Abrahame, *Principe de Basson* (Paris).

³⁵ J. B. de Laborde, *Essai sur la Musique* (Paris, 1780), pp. 325 and 342. The section dealing with the Bassoon is the work of Pierre Cugnier, an accomplished player.

³⁶ E. van der Straeten, *La Musique aux Pays-Bas*, IV, 73 (1867-88). *Ibid.*, *Les ménestrels aux Pays-Bas* (Bruxelles, 1878), p. 7.

³⁷ H. Eichborn, *Die Trompete* . . . (Leipzig, 1881), p. 6.

³⁸ Gropius, *Beiträge zur Geschichte Berlins* (1840), vol. II.

³⁹ M. Fürstenau, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der kgl. sächs. Capelle, Dresden*, 1849, p. 40 f.

Chorist Fagotte at Stuttgart in 1589.⁴⁰ Austrian Inventars of 1577-90 specify Bassdulzani,⁴¹ and the Ambras Inventar of 1596 includes "Tolzanae,"⁴² both of which probably refer to Dulzians.⁴³

The earliest scores to include Fagotte are those of Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) who employed two in 1619 and five in 1625.⁴⁴ Lavoix⁴⁵ mentions, among others to employ the Bassoon, Rauch (1648), Neri (1651), Böddecker (1660), Glettle (1667-70), all prior to Lully's use of the instrument in the French Opera in *Psyche* (1674).⁴⁶ In nearly every work of reference, it is stated that Cambert introduced the Bassoon in the orchestra in his *Pomone* (1671). Lavignac's *Encyclopédie* (1927) states definitely that this assertion is incapable of proof.⁴⁷ The fragmentary MS. music of *Pomone* in the library of the Paris Conservatoire mentions "hautbois," but not "bassons." We must remember, however, that the later seventeenth century composers commonly used their wood-wind in unison with the strings, merely adding, e.g. *con* or *senza fagotto* as required, and the bassoon may indeed have taken part in *Pomone*. In any event, even prior to Cambert's *Pomone*, Cesti, in his grand opera *Il pomo d'oro* (1667-68), used fagotti combined with two cornetti, three trombones and a regal to suggest the terrors of Hades.⁴⁸

This engraving⁴⁹ shows "Les douze grands hautbois du Roi," at the Coronation of Louis XV in 1722. Note that

⁴⁰ G. Bossert, "Die Hofkapelle unter Eberhard III." *Württ. Vierteljahrshafte* (1912), XXI, 134 ff.

⁴¹ *Jahrbuch der Kunstsammlungen der Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, VII, xxxi.

⁴² Cited by Sachs, *Handbuch der Instrumentenkunde* (Berlin, 1920), p. 325.

⁴³ C. Sachs, *Real Lexikon*, s.v. Tolzana=Dolzaina=Krummhorn. Vide *Sammelbände der I.M.G.*, XI, 590 ff.

⁴⁴ E. Euting, *Zur Geschichte der Blasinstrumente im 16 u. 17 Jhrhund.* (Berlin, 1899).

⁴⁵ H. Lavoix, *Histoire de l'Instrumentation* (1878). P. 244, Andrea Rauch, "Currus triumphalis" (an angel with Bassoon on frontispiece) (Vienna, 1648); p. 207, Massimiliano Neri, Sonata for 12 instruments including a Bassoon (Venice, 1651); p. 245, Böddecker, "Melosirenicum" including a Bassoon (1660); p. 246, Melchoir Glettle, "Expeditiones musicae" (1667-70). Fifth series includes Fagotto.

⁴⁶ "French opera before 1750," by Dr. J. E. Borland. *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 1906-7, p. 150.

⁴⁷ Lavignac, *Encyclopédie de la Mus.* s.v. Basson, p. 1570.

⁴⁸ Adler, *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich*, Band iii, p. xxv.

⁴⁹ Reproduced facing p. 32 in *Les Hotteterre et les Chédeville* by E. Thoinan (Paris, 1894).

ten oboes have as a bass two bassoons—seen in the background.

Bach regarded $e\flat$ or $f\sharp$ as the normal upward limit of the bassoon, and only in the period 1731–34 did he exceed this, in three Cantatas (97, 149 and 177) with g' , and in No. 42 and the "Quoniam" of the *Hohe Messe* with a' . Dr. Sanford Terry's interesting survey of Bach's treatment of the bassoon makes one wish that the use of the instrument by other composers might receive similar detailed investigation.⁵⁰

Bach introduced the Bassoon into one of his scores first in 1708 (Cantata No. 71), using the compass $B\flat$ — c' . In only five scores does he take it below C—in four of these to an occasional $B\flat$, or $B\sharp$, (the latter then as good as impracticable), and in one case (Cantata No. 31 of 1715) he takes it down to G, requiring the Quart (or Quint) Fagott. In 1723 and 1731 Bach's direction "Bassono grosso" and "Bassono" are unique designations for the bassoon.

In the Bagford Collection of Trade Cards at the British Museum is a curious one of John Ashbury, wind-instrument maker in London at the end of the seventeenth century. The engraving is by John Sturt (1658–1730) who has ingeniously employed bassoons, oboes, horns, and trumpets to form the letters.

This engraving⁵¹ of an unknown French bassoonist is the work of Madame Doublet, a noted Parisian artist who lived 1677–1771. The bassoon has obviously a bell-joint, and is played left-handed.

Felix Reiner⁵² (1732–82) was Chamber Bassoonist to the Duke of Bavaria.

Thos. Delcambre⁵³ (1766–1828), who was a noted Parisian bassoonist at the time of the Revolution, as a Colonel (Oberst) has been erroneously designated Oboist in a German hand.

I know of no portraits of seventeenth century British bassoonists and there are but few of the eighteenth century, when as soloists, there lived Baumgarten, Lampe, Miller, Parkinson, Holmes, Ashley, and Jenkinson.

⁵⁰ Dr. C. Sanford Terry, *Bach's Orchestra* (London, 1932), pp. 112–119 and Table XIII.

⁵¹ The portrait is probably that of a Court Bassoonist.

⁵² Vide G. Schilling: *Universal-Lexikon* (Stuttgart, 1837).

⁵³ Vide F. J. Fétis: *Biographie Universelle* (Paris, 1878).

The Lord Chamberlain's Records,⁵⁴ however, show that curtalls were in use in the Royal music at least from 1661-69.⁵⁵ In the latter year "two double curtolls" were bought at a cost of £52. At the Coronation of James II (1685),⁵⁶ two sackbuts and a double courtal took part in the procession, and Hawkins states the courtal figured again in 1714 at the Coronation of George I.⁵⁷ The four Waits of Coventry in 1678 played "Two treables, one tenor and a double curtall, all of them to be tunable."⁵⁸ The trebles certainly and the tenor probably refer to shawms. In 1696 the Waits of Edinburgh were directed to play "the French hautboyes and double curtlee."⁵⁹ At Exeter in 1738—a hundred and sixty years after the first mention of the curtall there—we read of the Waits' "Snuffling courtal."⁶⁰ At York, about the same time, a broadside mentions the Waits' "cortal with deep hum, hum."⁶¹ In 1707 Ed. Ward wrote "With voice as hoarse as double curtal,"⁶² and Dr. Creighton in 1727 wrote the curious line "Where curtals and bassoons their murmurs breathe."⁶³ The two names were, of course, synonymous. It was in 1722 that a curtall was added to the English Grenadiers' music, and by 1783 the band included four clarinets, two horns, one trumpet and two bassoons, etc.⁶⁴

The enactment of 1644 which banned church organs in England soon gave opportunities for instrumental accompaniment, and this was frequently supplied by the Waits of a municipality, or in the country by amateurs whose Christmas music-making and carol-singing gained for them

⁵⁴ H. C. de Lafontaine, *The King's Musick* (London, 1909), pp. 147-158 and 220.

⁵⁵ E. Ashmore, *Institution Laws, etc., of the Order of the Garter* (London, 1672), p. 576.

⁵⁶ F. Sandford's *History of the Coronation of James II* (London, 1687), p. 70.

⁵⁷ J. Hawkins, *Hist. of Music* (London, 1776), Bk. XVII, Chap. CLIX footnote.

⁵⁸ T. Sharp, *Dissertation on Pageants . . . at Coventry* (Coventry, 1825), p. 210.

⁵⁹ Town Council MS. Records, V. 35, fol. 249, 17th April, 1696.

⁶⁰ A. Brice, *The Mobjad : or the Battle of the Voice . . .* (Exeter, 1770) cited in *Notes and Queries*, 2nd Series, vol. X, p. 464.

⁶¹ Proclamations, Broad-sides, etc., in Chetham Lib., Manchester, No. 1524, "York Waits," quoted in *Notes and Queries*, 3rd Series, Vol. VII, p. 380.

⁶² Edward Ward, *Hudibras Redivivus* (3rd Edit., London, 1715), vol. II, p. 24.

⁶³ Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 37074.

⁶⁴ *History of the H.A.C.* by Capt. G. A. Raikes (London, 1878), vol. I, p. 270 and vol. II, p. 93.

the title of Waits. For over two centuries the West Gallery of many an English church was occupied by a group playing clarinet, flute, sometimes oboe and almost invariably a 'cello or bassoon. The Churchwardens' Accounts of many an English parish contain frequent references to the bassoon:—

1712. At Bunbury, Cheshire, one was bought for £5 5s. 0d.
 At St. Giles, Northampton do. £4 13s. 6d.
 and the player received 10/6 per annum until
 1799 when the salary was raised to £1 1 os.⁶⁵
1818. At Cockshutt, Salop, a Bassoon for the Church cost
 £2 10 od.⁶⁶
1772. Hayfield, Derbyshire. The arrival of a bassoon
 was made the occasion of special rejoicing.⁶⁷ The
 Churchwardens record:—
 Spent with singers when the new Bazoon came 2s. 6d.
 and, charges when the Bassoune came 3s. 6d.

There is a well-known painting⁶⁸ by Thomas Webster, R.A. (1800-86), entitled "The Village Choir," circa 1846—and believed to be that of Bow Brickhill, Bucks. The Parish Clerk, the Clarinet, Bassoon and 'Cello are clearly shown.

I have brought for your inspection an old church bassoon by Cahusac, London, dated 1769 (with four keys) played in Brailes Church, Warwickshire. An Astor bassoon (eight-keyed) now in Bucks. County Museum, played in Hawridge Church, Bucks., bears the following verse, suggestive of Quaker influence:—

I hear some men hate music, let them shew
 In holy writ what else the angels do ;
 Then those who do despise such sacred mirth
 Are neither fit for heaven nor for earth.

My friend, Canon K. H. MacDermott, Rector of Buxted, Sussex, has collected a great mass of information on Church Bands, and his book "Sussex Church Music in the Past"⁶⁹ gives the results of investigation of the church music in 111 Sussex Parishes. Twenty-two of these had a Bassoon, and at Alfriston there were five, and at Brightling a famous iron-master John Fuller, M.P. (1757-1834) presented nine bassoons to the Parish Church, but only so that they might drown the voices of the choir ! In Feock Church, Cornwall,

⁶⁵ Rev. J. C. Cox, *English Church Fittings* (1923), pp. 240-1.

⁶⁶ Unpublished MS. Kindly communicated by the Rev. Canon MacDermott.

⁶⁷ *The Reliquary* (April, 1908), p. 144.

⁶⁸ Original in Victoria and Albert Museum (Sheepshanks Collection).

⁶⁹ *Sussex Church Music in the Past*, 2nd Edit. (Chichester, 1923).

it is said that on one occasion seven bassoons played the bass and "when they all closed down on low F it was like Heaven."⁷⁰

The barrel organ, and, after 1840, the harmonium, finally displaced the church bands.

Before outlining the nineteenth century development of the Bassoon, I will deal rapidly with the Contrabassoon. The Quart Fagott descending to G,, and the Quint Fagott descending to F,, were the deepest members, until 1619 when Praetorius stated⁷¹ that the Director of Music at the Electoral Court of Berlin, Hans Schreiber, was at work on a large Contrafagott to descend a fourth lower than the Quint Fagott, i.e. to 16 foot C, an octave below the Chorst Fagott. "Should he succeed," writes Praetorius, "it will be a splendid instrument, the like of which has never been seen, and will really be something to marvel at, because organ-builders also have tried hard to bring out clearly and well the lowest two notes C, and D, of the 16 foot on the Bass Trombone stop. Time will show." Schreiber must have been only partially successful, for, although such an instrument is mentioned in the Inventar of the Barfüsser-kirche in Frankfurt a/M. in 1626,⁷² we hear nothing more of the Contrabassoon until Handel included it in his Hymn for the Coronation of George II in 1727. As no Contra was available, Thomas Stanesby Senior was commissioned to make one, and Handel's bassoonist J. F. Lampe was engaged to play it. Burney⁷³ informs us that either the player or his reeds failed. An announcement in the *London Daily Post* of 6th August, 1739, states that at Marylebone Gardens "the usual Evening Concert will include two Grand or Double Bassoons made by Mr. Stanesby, Senior." Handel included the Double Bassoon in his *L'Allegro* in 1740, but with what success we do not know. At the Handel Festival in 1784, Parke⁷⁴ who was one of the twenty-six oboes, states that

Mr. Ashley, a sub-director, and first bassoon at Covent Garden Theatre, played for the first time on a newly-invented instrument called the double-bassoon . . . which rested on a stand and had a sort of flue affixed to the top of it, similar (with the exception of smoke) to that of a Richmond steamboat.

⁷⁰ "Cornish Christmas," by A. K. Hamilton Jenkin in *Good House-keeping*, Dec., 1938.

⁷¹ *De Organographia* (1619), chap. XI, p. 38.

⁷² Cited by Sachs in *Handbuch der Instrumentenkunde* (Berlin, 1920), p. 323.

⁷³ *Account of Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey*, by Dr. Burney (London, 1785), p. 7.

⁷⁴ W. T. Parke, *Musical Memoirs* (London, 1830), vol. I, pp. 42-3.

He concludes by saying that it had never been heard and was never seen after the performances were ended.

Fortunately a Contra of this period survives. It is the earliest known British Bassoon, is stamped "Stanesby Junior, London 1739," and is now in the National Museum, Dublin. It has been stated⁷⁵ that this is the Contra made for Handel, but that instrument was by Stanesby Senior, not Junior. It has also been said to be the Contra played by Lampe at Marylebone Gardens in 1739, but the Contras advertised were likewise by Stanesby Senior and this Contra is by Stanesby Junior. In any case, the picture gives no idea of this four-keyed giant, 8' 4" high with a tube of 16' descending to Sub-Contra B \flat , a note scored by Haydn in 1785 in *The Creation*. The vibration number of such a note is so low as to make smooth tone-production a matter of considerable difficulty. This accounts for C, or even D, being the lowest limit of the continental Contras of the nineteenth century.

Everyone is doubtless familiar with the Contrabassoon illustrated in the first two editions of *Grove* and the same block appears in Prout and Schlesinger. It is precisely this Contra seen here which, with the other instruments in the group, belonging to the late Dr. Wm. H. Stone (1830-91)—a keen player of Tenoroon, Bassoon and Contra, and author of the articles on those and other instruments in the first two editions of *Grove*. The instruments passed to the late Mr. Cyril Spottiswoode, to whose widow I am indebted for the photograph and permission to examine the bassoons. Dr. Stone does not seem to have been—as he claimed—the designer of this type of Contra, now obsolete, but he certainly deserves the credit of re-introducing the Contra at the Handel Festival of 1871, after it had been disused since its ill-starred appearance at the Handel Commemoration of 1784. This Contra was really the eighteen-keyed Contrabassophon invented and made in 1849 by H. J. Haseneier, an instrument-maker at Coblenz.⁷⁶ Its tube 16' 4", enlarging from $\frac{1}{4}$ " to 4" was curved fourfold and its compass was from Contra C to middle c. The holes were all bored of graduated size and at their theoretical intervals and were covered by keys. The sound was powerful but "rumbling" and "coarse." It lacked the

⁷⁵ Catal. Royal Mil. Exhib. (Day) (London, 1891), p. 81.

⁷⁶ It is correctly designated in the Guide to the Internat. Inventions Exhib., p. 56, when the instrument was lent by Dr. Stone. For illustration and details, see Cat. of Royal Mil. Exhib. 1890, pp. 81-2, and Plate VIII B.

low B \flat_2 and B \natural_2 . Alfred Morton (London)⁷⁷ and Fontaine-Besson (Paris) made a few such contras. The alternative Brass Double-Bassoon or Contrebasse-à-anche with fifteen keys, made originally in 1839, by Schöllnast und Sohn, of Pressburg (Bratislava), improved by V. F. Cervény, of Königgrätz in 1856 and 1867 and by Mahillon of Brussels in 1868, lacked even the low C, and C, \sharp , stopping at Contra D.⁷⁸ Forsyth describes its tone as "coarse and blurdy," and though this Contra was easily played, it was practically unknown to English players.

In the middle are three beautiful rosewood and maple bassoons by the celebrated Jean-Nicolas Savary, called Savary Jeune (1786-c.1850). On the right are two excellent little sixteen and fourteen-keyed tenoroons by the same maker.⁷⁹ Passing reference, however brief, must be made to a curious error made by Dr. Stone who maintained in his article in *Grove* that the Oboe da Caccia of Bach was the Tenoroon, i.e. a Bassoon raised a fourth, and not the Cor Anglais which is, of course, an Oboe lowered a fifth. His erroneous contention that Tenoroon and the Oboe da Caccia were identical was based on no stronger evidence than a similarity of treatment in transposition, but there can be no doubt that the Oboe da Caccia was the ancestor of the Cor Anglais, and bore no relationship to the Tenoroon.

The usual Contra to-day is by Heckel of Biebrich, who makes several types descending to C, or, as with those shown, to B \flat_2 and A $_2$, an incredibly low note to be reached with full round smooth tone. French type Contras by Buffet-Crampon of Paris are also used, descending likewise to C, or B \flat_2 . Wagner praised the Heckel Contra highly in 1879, but, as Herr Heckel explains in his book *Der Fagott*,⁸⁰ Wagner wrote only *Parsifal* after that date and so we do not find the Contra in his earlier works—although it has been added in places by Richter. Circa 1888 attempts to lighten the Contrabassoon were made by Berthold and Söhne of Speyer-am-Rhein. Modelled on Haseneier's Contra of 1849, Berthold's Contra was made of papier mâché.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Catal. Royal Mil. Exhib. 1890, p. 82, Nos. 172 and 173, the latter in F, and lent by Sir Arthur Sullivan.

⁷⁸ Catal. Royal Mil. Exhib. 1890, pp. 82-3, with illustration.

⁷⁹ Catal. Royal Mil. Exhib., Nos. 164 and 165. Designated "A pair of Oboi da Caccia or Alti Fagotti by Savary," they were lent by Dr. Stone at the 1885 Internat. Inventions Exhib., London.

⁸⁰ Page 20.

⁸¹ Illustration in *Der Fagott*, p. 23.

Only passing reference need be made to the Sarrusophone, a family of eighteen-keyed double-reed brass instruments invented in 1863 by Sarrus—a French Army bandmaster—in seven sizes, but known now mainly by the Contrabass in E \flat or in C. It has been scored by Saint-Saëns, Massenet in *Esclarmonde*, by Delius in his *Dance Rhapsody*, by Holbrooke in *Apollo and the Seaman*, and by Ravel in his *Rapsodie espagnole*. Wide conical bore, and large holes bored at theoretical intervals give a tone-quality which is fuller and stronger, but harder and less expressive than that of the Bassoon family.

In the early years of the nineteenth century there was felt the need for extending the upper register of the bassoon. The upper limit of g', observed by Mozart, and by Haydn and Beethoven in their earlier works, was first extended to a' by the addition of a "wing-key" operated by the left thumb and assisting in the production of the twelfth of the fundamental scale. One such key could be used to give a', bb', and bb' and a second, when added, gave c'', c#'', and d''. The seven-keyed bassoon in Ozi's *Méthode* of 1803⁸² has the normal six and one wing key. Koch's *Lexikon* of 1802⁸³ also gives seven keys but no low F#, and two wing-keys which he states are found "only on modern bassoons." The bassoon's true position as a tenor instrument was now realised and it was no longer relegated to doubling the bass.

At this period the German and the French types began to evolve, and each was to acquire peculiarities of construction, key mechanism and bore, which radically affected the tone-quality.

Among celebrated German makers were K. A. Grenser (1720-1807) and his nephew J. H. Grenser (1764-1813), and Grundmann, all of Dresden, also Kirst of Potsdam. The so-called "Dresden bassoon," however, possessed inequalities and inaccuracies in intonation which could at most be partially counteracted by cross-fingering and "forking." Carl Almenraeder (1786-1843), an accomplished bassoonist, determined to remedy these defects with the guidance of Gottfried Weber, celebrated as a theorist and acoustician. In 1817 Almenraeder experimented in Schott's factory at Mainz and published his findings in a treatise in 1820,⁸⁴ describing a fifteen-keyed

⁸² E. Ozi, *Méthode de Basson* (2nd Edit., Paris, 1803).

⁸³ H. C. Koch, *Musicalisches Lexikon* (Offenbach, 1802).

⁸⁴ C. Almenraeder, *Traité sur le perfectionnement du Basson, avec deux tableaux* (Mainz, c. 1820).

bassoon. Gottfried Weber dealt with this and later improvements in *Caecilia* in 1825 and 1828.⁸⁵ The formation of a partnership between Almenraeder and J. A. Heckel in 1831 at Biebrich am Rhein, and the subsequent development of the bassoon family in the factory of three generations of Heckels is described in the Centenary Edition of *Der Fagott* published in 1931. I was privileged to revise with Herr Wilhelm Heckel personally my translation of that booklet, and I am indebted to him for much learned in the course of a visit to his workshops and his rich instrumental museum. Almenraeder's Fagottschule appeared first in 1841, but Weissenborn's Schule of 1885 dealt with the twenty-one keyed *Heckel bassoon* which by then had largely become standardised.

In 1889 Heckel patented the ebonite lining of the wing and the narrow tube of the butt, and this device was later widely adopted. It is interesting to learn that Lafleur's catalogue of about 1875 mentions this lining as being fitted by Morton of London, who thus appears to have forestalled Heckel.

At the risk of arousing controversy I must express my own preference for the French rather than the German tone-quality. I believe that the French is the true bassoon tone—less round and smooth than the German perhaps, but fuller, more reedy and with much more character, while equally capable of blending, as it so often must, with the horns, etc. From the technical point of view, the German type is said to be more even throughout its compass, and offers many alternative fingerings besides greater facility in the upper register which Heckel claims can be played to a^b". It is questionable if notes above c" are really worth while.

In France, Porthaux and Savary (père) were followed from 1823-42 by Jean Nicolas Savary (Savary jeune), who was both an accomplished bassoonist and a highly skilled maker. J. F. Simiot of Lyons and F. G. Adler of Paris among others contributed to the development of the French bassoon, before Buffet-Crampon and Goumas commenced to give effect to improvements devised by E. Jancourt (1815-1901), professor of Bassoon at Paris Conservatoire. Jancourt's *Méthode* of 1847 recommends bassoons by Savary, Adler, and Buffet-Crampon. The Buffet shown is a modern twenty-one keyed type. Later editions of Jancourt mention

⁸⁵ *Cæcilia* Band 2, No. 6, pp. 123-40 and Band 9, No. 34, pp. 128-30 (Mainz, Feb., 1825 and 1828).

F. Triébert (1813-78) who is known in connection with the bassoon only through his attempt to apply to it the system of covered holes bored at theoretical intervals and popularly though inaccurately termed "Boehm-system."

As early as 1825 C. J. Sax (père) exhibited at Haarlem a bassoon with covered holes, and in 1842 he patented⁸⁶ in Brussels a metal bassoon on this system. Triébert and Marzoli, working together in Paris, on suggestions of Boehm, produced a twenty-nine keyed wooden bassoon which was exhibited in 1855. A Marzoli "Boehm-type" is shown on the right of this group from the Fine Arts Museum, Boston.⁸⁷ Meanwhile in London, Cornelius Ward had devised a similar type with twenty-three keys,⁸⁸ patented in 1853, after being exhibited in 1851. Although Ward's bassoon was highly praised by Tamplini the bassoon virtuoso (1817-88), and Triébert Boehm-Bassoons were still on the market for £60 about 1875, they had no success nor had any of the others on similar rational acoustical principles.⁸⁹ Their failure was due to several causes: the timbre was denaturalised as a result of the altered position and depth of the holes; the numerous keys necessitated complicated mechanism; there was extreme difficulty in keeping so many keys air-tight; the weight was excessive; and the price was very considerable. How apt are the words of Dr. Stone⁹⁰ :—

The Bassoon . . . has evidently originated in a fortuitous manner, developed by successive improvements rather of an empirical than of a theoretical nature. Various attempts have been made to give greater accuracy and completeness to its singularly capricious scale, but up to the present all these seem either to have diminished the flexibility of the instrument in florid passages, or to have impaired its peculiar but telling and characteristic tone . . . Even a fine player cannot play upon an unfamiliar instrument. Each has to be learned independently, and although the theoretical imperfection of such a course is obvious, it has a certain compensation in the fact that a bassoon-player must necessarily rely upon his ear alone for correct intonation, and that he thus more nearly approximates to the manipulation of stringed instruments than any member of the orchestra except the trombones.

In conclusion, may I add a word or two upon the characteristics and capabilities of the modern bassoon. I must protest, first against Prout's innocent but unfortunate description of it as "the clown of the orchestra." A recent

⁸⁶ Belgian Patent. Brevet 1634/1415. Applied for 7th July, 1842.

⁸⁷ Royal Mil. Exhib., No. 166, p. 79.

⁸⁸ British Patent, No. 140 of 1853.

⁸⁹ G. Tamplini, *Brevi cenni sul sistema Boehm e della sua applicazione al fagotto* (Bologna, 1888).

⁹⁰ Grove, *Dict. of Music*, 2nd Edit. (1900), s.v. Bassoon.

writer in the *Radio Times* altered this to "the low comedian of the orchestra." A *Times* critic has deplored the unfortunate assonance of bassoon and buffoon, and has written in defence in *The Times* of 15th August, 1925, one of the best articles on the instrument under the heading "The Gentleman of the Orchestra." The occasion was the performance by Archie Camden in Queen's Hall of Mozart's Bassoon Concerto of 1774. I wish the article could be reprinted *in extenso* in a standard work of reference.

The Times critic gives instances of the wide range of the bassoon's capabilities, its whimsical grace, its combination of agility and dignity, its *cantabile* powers, and its incisiveness where strong rhythmic definition is required. The plaintive quality of the upper register, the middle adapted for singing passages, and the lower notes grim, grotesque, or comical at will—such is the versatility of the bassoon, revealing an unusual sensibility "which has been abused by the buffoons of orchestration, but has endeared him as a gentleman of character to the great composers among whom Mozart and Beethoven have done him most honour."

DISCUSSION.

THE CHAIRMAN (Canon Francis W. Galpin): We all know that the objects of our Association embrace a large field. It has been said that we do not consider modern music as we should. We not only consider our present-day music, but the future of music, which is still better. But more especially we are to deal with the history of music and musical instruments, and we are very grateful to Mr. Langwill for giving us a lecture on the bassoon. I say so with feeling, because it is commonly said: "How wonderfully a composer uses such and such an instrument! How marvellous is the execution of such and such a player!" forgetting the ingenuity, the skill, the patience spent by the makers upon perfecting the instrument itself.

I have with me a book by Ambrosio, printed in 1539, in which the *Phagotum* is illustrated.⁹¹ When I first saw that picture, I thought what a magnificent structure it was. But really it is only quite small, about twenty-two inches high. The player sat down, and it rested on his knees. It is in fact a double clarinet, but played with bellows under one arm and a bag as a wind reservoir, under the other.

⁹¹ *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam . . . et descriptio ac simulachrum Phagoti Afranii*. Theseo Ambrosio auctore (Pavia, 1539).

But the point is this—and all credit to Canon Afranio—it is the first known instance of a block of wood bored with two parallel tubes, thus shortening its length by half. The two tubes were connected by a little loop. It gave birth to the other instruments of a similar form, such as Dulzians and Bassoons.

The character of the bassoon has been well alluded to by our lecturer. It seems to me to be such a human instrument. One instrument is not like another. Its ways must be studied, its little tricks even; and when this has been done then the player can depend on it as a trusty friend which will answer every desire, every whim.

It once fell to my lot to play the double-bassoon in Haydn's *Creation*. In the bass solo "Now heaven in fullest glory shone," after the words "with heavy beasts the ground is trod," there is a note on the double bassoon (*sforzando*) in the thirty-two foot octave. My bassoon was one of the gigantic ones, it was ten feet high. I remember as the soloist came to that particular word, "trod," I managed to get out the deepest B \flat from the instrument; he turned round and looked at me, wondering what sort of beast was really coming!

Dr. Stone's bassoon, as the lecturer has said, only descended to the sixteen foot C. I was told on good authority that when he came to that passage in Haydn's *Creation*, he would roll up his music and stuff it into the bell of his instrument and then with a loose lip he was able to get the lowest B \flat .

The SECRETARY: The lecturer referred to the dignity of the bassoon. I shall never forget the extraordinarily impressive opening of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*. This work opens with a solo bassoon, commencing on top C. The solo continues for several bars in this high register—it is joined later by horn and clarinets—and the effect is arresting and dignified in the extreme.

Mr. JOHN PARR: I have much enjoyed Mr. Langwill's lecture. I was hoping to write a book on the bassoon and tackled several publishers about it. One said: "How many bassoon-players were there in the country?" I said about a couple of thousand. "Will they all buy it?" he asked. I said "No," so he maintained it would not pay to print it.

I have a collection of about thirty bassoons from early dates. The earliest is 1763 by Milhouse. Then I have four tenorons and a little discant instrument made by Hawkes (c. 1920); one with only six keys on it, and another

which came into the possession of the late John Anderson. It is a very beautiful instrument, by Morton.

I have the only original bass oboe in this country, made by Piatet et Benoit in France. It has quite a unique tone. If any members come to Sheffield and care to see my collection, I shall be very pleased to show it.

Mr. CARSE : Mr. Langwill and I have exchanged information on the subject of the bassoon for a good many years and I do not think we have many points of disagreement. If we have they are small and of little consequence. As to the origin of the bassoon from the strange apparition, the *Phagotum*, I differ from most authorities. Canon Galpin is a believer in the origin of the bassoon from this instrument, but Mr. Langwill is, I think, not quite convinced. I see so little resemblance between the two instruments that I cannot accept the phagotum as being the origin of the bassoon. The shortening of the length of an instrument by doubling the tube was well-known even in the sixteenth century or earlier. Trombones and trumpets were all doubled.

I am the possessor of a collection of bassoons, twenty-five or so, the earliest one by Caleb Gedney, between 1750 and 1770. I have several from that time onwards, to the end of the eighteenth century, and a good number of nineteenth century specimens. Like Mr. Parr I am always glad to show my instruments to anyone who is interested.

I wish this lecture could be expanded and fuller details be given in a form that could be studied at leisure. The proposed book on the bassoon ought to materialise, but it needs funds, it wants a public subsidy, as I know books on such subjects will not be undertaken as commercial speculations.

Mr. R. B. CHATWIN : I think I have a right to say something, as Mr. Langwill has been kindly sending me notes about the history of the bassoon for many years. It is perhaps not realised how much interesting information on this subject Mr. Langwill has collected ; he has enough material for at least twenty lectures.

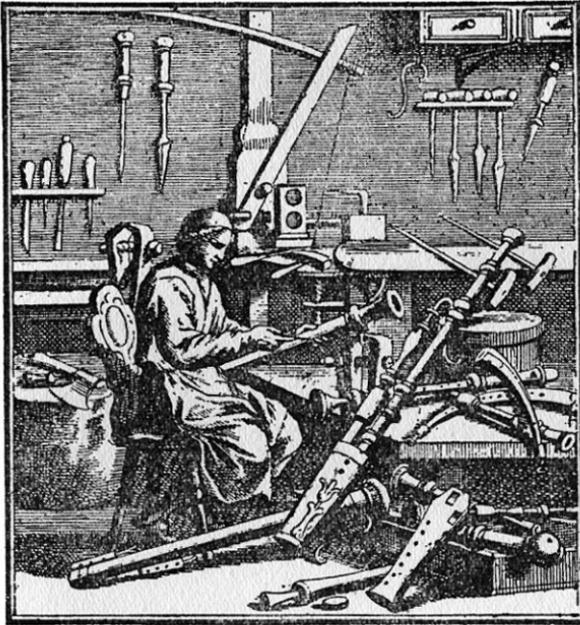
The CHAIRMAN : Before we draw to a close I want again to thank Mr. Langwill for a most interesting paper with numbers of very fine lantern slides.

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Alter Fagottbauer bei der Arbeit in seiner Werkstatt
Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts.

Nach Christoff Weigel, Nürnberg 1698.

(see footnote 25).



From a painting in the National Gallery of Painting & Sculpture, Madrid.

(see footnote 13).