

TECHNOLOGY

Beer-Proof Piano

Sloping lids, fire-proofed plastic keys and anchored string assembly among features of unusual piano on display in London along with 10,000 other items.

► A BEER-PROOF piano of revolutionary design is science's latest answer to destructive servicemen who want more out of a piano than music.

It was on display at the British Industries Fair in London along with 10,000 other new or improved items. The piano is built of solid oak and has no sharp edges to bruise servicemen should they fall against it during horseplay.

It has sloping lids and ledges that beer mugs and cigarettes will not stay on; fire-proofed keys covered with a plastic that cannot be picked off, and an extra-loud volume to discourage heavy ammunition-boots on the loud pedal.

Built by Lambert London, Ltd., a firm that has reconditioned hundreds of pianos from service canteens, the new instrument incorporates some safety features deemed wise from past experience.

For instance, its designers fixed it so that curious servicemen could see the insides work without having to rip off a single chunk of wood. But designers anchored the bottom boards so they could not be taken off and used as backing for dart targets. They also fixed it so servicemen could not stuff food or throw money into the works.

Special attention was given to anchoring the string assembly inside the piano after an RAF unit took a conventional piano apart to use the string assembly as a harp in a nativity play.

Commenting on the gaff pianos must take in service canteens, a British service organization said, "Apparently standard pianos could not stand up indefinitely to having their insides sluiced with beer, their lids ringed from glasses, their keys burned by cigarettes, and high-spirited canteen cowboys breaking apart the caseworks."

Three unusual pianos, one of them being "liberally poisoned," were also displayed at the fair. The poisoned piano is designed for use in the tropics. It has deadly chemicals impregnated in the works to protect felts and hammers from destructive insects.

The world's largest grand piano and a tiny piano especially suited to crowded efficiency apartments were also shown in the "musical" section of the fair. The large grand piano weighs a ton, is 11 feet 8 inches long and has resounding bass tones.

The small piano is designed to fit inconspicuously into any odd corner, yet it has good quality of tone. Billed as the world's smallest piano, the instrument attracted such crowds when first displayed that policemen had to be called in to keep order in the showrooms.

A new device for amplifying voices from a telephone receiver also was shown at the fair. The receiver can be laid on a battery-operated amplifier that occupies less than six inches of desk space. The amplifier reproduces voices loud enough for a roomful of persons to hear the conversation at once.

An "unburstable sack" for grain packaging has been found extra-durable when compared with other jute sacks. The secret of the sack is its woven seams instead of conventional sewn seams.

A collapsible all-steel ironing table weighing only 15 pounds has tubular legs that are extended or folded in a single movement. There is no danger of nipped fingers. An automatic locking device keeps the board rigid while in use. The surface is perforated with 1,000 holes that allow heat and steam to escape.

A new kind of coin-operated radio displayed at the fair can be installed in hotels and used by guests without fear of disturbing persons in adjoining rooms who want to sleep. The volume of all sets can be controlled from a master panel by the hotel manager.

A multi-purpose bed chair made of light tubular steel has a back and two long arms ending in rubber handles. A foot rest with two elastic foot supports can be attached easily or detached by the patient. The chair is said to be useful in orthopedics and in physiotherapy.

A garment designed for television viewers was displayed in the clothing section of the fair. Known as the telejacket, the garment is cut from fine velvet cord, has a shawl collar and gives complete freedom of movement.

Science News Letter, May 24, 1952

NATURAL RESOURCES

World's Dry Areas Can Learn From Each Other

► DROUGHT AND desert areas in one part of the world have their counterparts in other parts of the world. Methods which work to alleviate dry conditions in one place will probably work in similar places.

These are the conclusions of Dr. Peveril Meigs, Vienna, Va., representing the International Geographical Union at an international meeting on desert problems in Jerusalem.

Dr. Meigs presented a large-scale map showing the distribution throughout the world of the climatic types of Israel. He brought out that an area in the vicinity

of Riverside, Calif., and one on the coast of Lower California are much like the Negev desert of southern Israel, Morocco and much of southern Australia. The greater part of the Colorado desert of California and Arizona, he said, resembles the desert type of the Jordan River valley.

These and other similar areas of the world were pointed out on what Dr. Meigs called homoclimatic maps. He said they may suggest areas from which plant and animal introductions, methods of land and water use, or ideas on clothing and housing can be successfully transmitted to areas of similar climate.

Science News Letter, May 24, 1952

MARINE BIOLOGY

Whale of an Itch Brings Crab Trap Ruin

► GRAY WHALES are scratching themselves on crab traps and are ruining them, fishermen in Astoria, Ore., are complaining. Schools of gray whales are traveling north in their annual spring migration. They are sighted spouting and contorting a short distance from shore all along the Oregon coast.

Crab anglers wish the whales would find another means of satisfying their itches and thus leave their crab pots alone.

Science News Letter, May 24, 1952

BACTERIOLOGY

Filter Tags Germs In Fifteen Hours

► A NEW filter device developed by the U. S. Army Chemical Corps will detect and identify germs in the air in 15 hours instead of almost four days.

This progress in defense against germ warfare was announced by Brigadier General William M. Creasy, commanding general. Chemical Corps Research and Engineering Command, at the meeting of the Armed Forces Chemical Association in Chicago.

Now under development, he reported, is a radiation dosage indicator which will tell a fighter exposed to radiological warfare how much more radiation he can safely take.

The Chemical Corps is now emphasizing development of equipment to make any reasonably air-tight building or shelter safe against poison gas, germs or radiological agents spread through air. This type of "collective protection" is needed because protective clothing and masks against all three possible agents are too bulky and uncomfortable to be worn for long periods.

Needed, Gen. Creasy said, is a "chemical nose" which will smell out and identify as many different types of poison gases as possible and, by connection to a mechanical brain with "electrical vocal cords," announce its findings.

Science News Letter, May 24, 1952