

er things, like electronic switching systems and lightwave equipment. "You have to keep up with the times," he says philosophically, while noting that the newer systems are much easier to work on. "A lot of the new stuff is just plug-in," he says. "With panel, you had to scrape the

insulation off tens of thousands of wire ends and hand solder each and every one of them." "Panel," he concludes, "was rough," but he's clearly speaking with affection.

Nostalgically, he reels off the names of long-gone panel men in the same reverent tones sports fans

use when they talk about their heroes of yesteryear. But, when the last panel man was asked if he'd provide this story with a neat ending by retiring with the last panel office, he was quick to shrug off the idea. "Maybe, in about five years," he says. "Maybe." ☠

A Marvelous Belgian Telephone From Around 1890!

by Jan Verhelst

In September 2021 we could visit the depot of the Museum of Art and History in Brussels, Belgium. This museum keeps the telephones of the former telecommunication museum. We were surprised to find the following marvelous telephone from around 1890 (Fig. 1). This phone was used by the Belgian minister of Railways, Post and Telecommunications in the 1890s.

The telephone we are looking at is a typical telephone from around 1890.

- As the quality of the telephone lines was limited at that time, two "ear pieces" were provided to increase the intelligibility of the conversations.

- The microphone was presumably a carbon pencil transmitter and was mounted behind the wooden rectangular panel on the front. The transmitter is made of carbon rods, and is behind a very thin layer



Fig. 1 - A beautiful Belgian telephone from around 1890. Source: postcard of the former Museum of Telephony & Telegraphy (via Fons Vanden Berghe)



Fig. 2 - Socket of the destinations, with engraved names



Fig. 3 - Nameplate of the manufacturer

of wood that vibrates from voice waves.

- It is a typical "hierarchical" telephone for a "boss", in this case the minister, could call his assistants. His assistants could call the minister only, and not each other.

- On the front there is an oval plate with the name of the manufacturer (Fig. 3).

The recipients could be chosen by inserting a plug in the appropriate socket and turning the crank.

The name of the recipient, which in this case were departments of the Ministry, was engraved around each socket (Fig. 2), i.e. "Direction Exploitation" and "Direction Marine".

A search in old Brussels address books (the so-called "almanacs") showed that the "Compagnie de Télégraphie et de Téléphonie Internationales" was founded around 1890 by Charles Mourlon (1851-1932).

Charles Mourlon was an important person in the Belgian electro-technical industry from about 1880 to 1930. Already in the early 1880s, he was active as an electro-technical manufacturer. In the Brussels address book of 1882, we did find an advertisement about the company he was running at that



Fig. 4 - Charles Mourlon (1851-1932)
Source www.geneanet.org

point in time “Mourlon & Co.”

In addition to telephony and telegraphy products, he also manufactured Leclanché batteries with a license and other things (see Fig. 6.)

In the mid-1880s, he commercial-



Fig. 5 - Demo long-distance telephony at the 1885 Antwerp World's Fair.

ized François Van Rysselberghe's invention¹, which combined long-distance telephone connections with long-distance telegraphic connections over the same wires by using filters.

This was demonstrated at the 1885 Antwerp World Fair, where 35 listeners could simultaneously hear a concert performed in a concert hall in Brussels, sent over telephone lines to Antwerp (see Fig. 5). This was 1885 streaming technology!

Charles Mourlon, who was called an “ingénieur-électricien”, was not only a good businessman, but he was also technically skilled. He wrote several books about electricity, including a book (see Fig. 7) called *Les Téléphones Usuels* (the usual telephones) written in 1887. He described all the telephones he knew at that time and how they worked.

In short, he was someone who strongly supported and promoted the emerging Belgian electro-technical industry at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

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Ateliers de Construction
Téléphones, Télégraphes, Sonneries et Signaux électriques, etc.
PORTE-VOIX ET PARATONNERRES

MOURLON & C^{IE}
61, RUE DE RUYTSBROECK, 61, ancienne rue Montagne des Quatre Vents, BRUXELLES

LUMIÈRE ÉLECTRIQUE
LAMPES A INCANDESCENCE ET A ARC VOLTAIQUE

LAMPES NOTHOMB
Machines dynamo-électriques de Méritone

PILES LECLANCHÉ

SEULES PILES
employées par
International Bell Telephone
Company
OF NEW-YORK
et
par toutes les Sociétés
téléphoniques
en Belgique, en France,
en Angleterre,
en Allemagne, en Suisse,
en Italie,
en Norvège, en Suède,
etc., etc.

Modèles aux Expositions Paris 1867-1878-1880, Vienne 1873, Bruxelles 1875-1880

Installations divers. — Câbles réservaires pour téléphones. — Câbles pour lumières électriques, etc., etc.

CATALOGUE GÉNÉRAL ILLUSTRE ENVOUTÉ SUR DEMANDÉ.

Un catalogue de physiques des piles complètes est mis à la disposition, du public, qui peut ainsi se rendre compte du fonctionnement des divers appareils les piles en usage.

Fig. 6 - Advertisement Mourlon & Co (1882)

Credits

The pictures of Fig. 2 and 3 were made by TCI members Stefan Biesemans and Jan Verhelst in the depot of the museum of Art and History in Brussels, Belgium. ☐

Footnotes

¹See article “François Van Rysselberghe (1846-1893), a pioneer of long-distance telephone networks” in Singing Wires of September 2019.

CHARLES MOURLON

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LES

TÉLÉPHONES USUELS

Téléphones sans pile
Transmetteurs à charbon — Microphones
Bureaux centraux
Accessoires des installations téléphoniques
Fils et câbles conducteurs
Induction

Télégraphie et téléphone simultanées par les mêmes fils
Téléphones à grande distance
Auditions téléphoniques — Appareils divers
Divers d'installations téléphoniques

DEUXIÈME ÉDITION

ENTIÈREMENT REVUE
AVEC 340 FIGURES DANS LE TEXTE
ET 11 PLANCHES DANS TEXTE

W.M. LE BÈGUE ET C^{IE}, ÉDITEURS
61, RUE DE LA MARCHEUSE
BRUXELLES | 53, RUE DE LILLE, 2^e
PARIS

Fig. 7 - Front page book on telephones written in 1887 by Mourlon

A Marvelous Belgian Telephone From Around 1890!

by Jan Verhelst

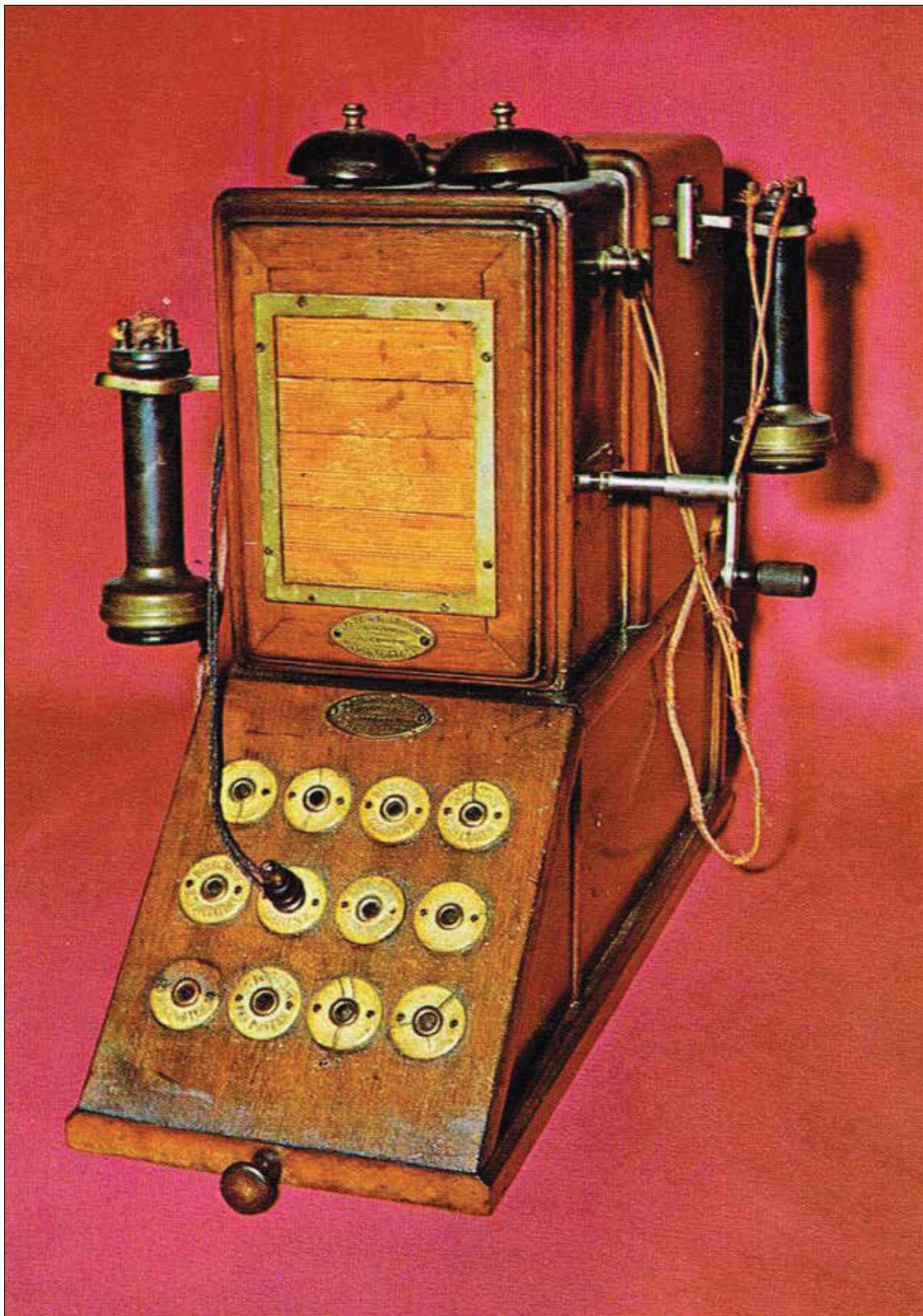


Fig. 1 - A beautiful Belgian telephone from around 1890. Source: postcard of the former Museum of Telephony & Telegraphy (via Fons Vanden Berghe)



Fig. 2 - Socket of the destinations,
with engraved names



Fig. 3 - Nameplate of the manufacturer



Fig. 4 - Charles Mourlon (1851-1932)
Source www.geneanet.org



Fig. 137. — Vue de la salle des auditions téléphoniques à l'Exposition d'Anvers où le public entendait la musique des concerts du Waux-Hall, à Bruxelles.

Fig. 5 - Demo long-distance telephony at the 1885 Antwerp World's Fair.

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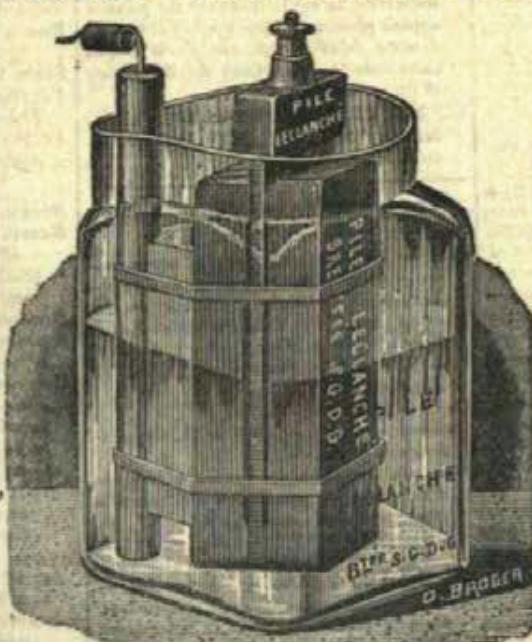
PILES LECLANCHÉ

SEULES PILES

employées par
L'International Bell Telephone
Company

OF NEW-YORK

et
par toutes les Sociétés
téléphoniques
en Belgique, en France,
en Angleterre,
en Allemagne, en Suisse,
en Italie,
en Norvège, en Suède,
etc., etc.



SEULES PILES

adoptées par les principaux
Gouvernements de l'Europe et de
l'Amérique
pour leurs services
télégraphiques

En Belgique, plus de
20,000 PILES LECLANCHÉ
en service sur
le réseau télégraphique
de l'Etat
et sortant de nos
ateliers.

Médailles aux Expositions Paris 1867-1878-1880, Vienne 1873, Bruxelles 1875-1880

Isolateurs divers. — Câbles souterrains pour téléphones. — Câbles pour lumière électrique, etc., etc.

CATALOGUE GÉNÉRAL ILLUSTRÉ ENVOYÉ SUR DEMANDE.

Un cabinet de physique des plus complets est mis à la disposition du public, qui peut ainsi se rendre compte du fonctionnement des divers appareils les plus en usage.

Fig. 6 - Advertisement Mourlon & Co (1882)

CHARLES MOURLON

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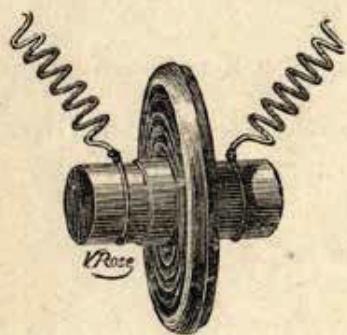
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Transmetteurs à charbon — Microphones
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Téléphonie à grande distance
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Devis d'installations téléphoniques

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ENTIÈREMENT REFONDUE
AVEC 146 FIGURES DANS LE TEXTE
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J. LEBÈGUE ET C^{IE}, ÉDITEURS
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BRUXELLES | PARIS

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