

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 Berghen)

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 Murlon (1851-1932).

Charles Murlon 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. 2 - Socket of the destinations, with engraved names



Fig. 3 - Nameplate of the manufacturer



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

point in time “Murlon & 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. 6 - Advertisement Murlon & Co (1882)



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.

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 Murlon, 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.

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*.

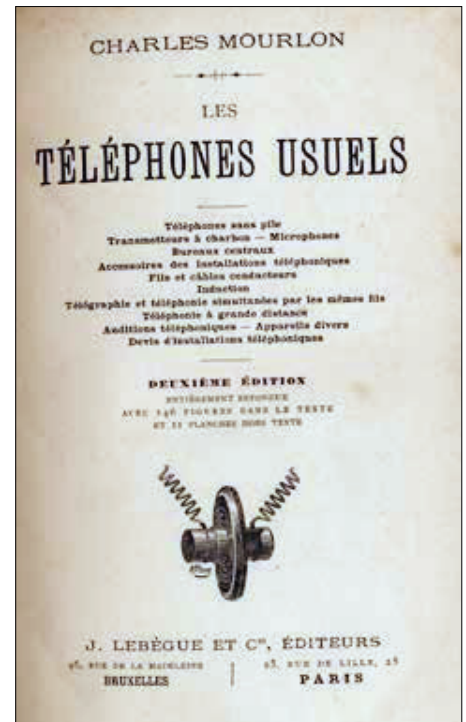


Fig. 7 - Front page book on telephones written in 1887 by Murlon

A Marvelous Belgian Telephone From Around 1890!

by Jan Verhelst

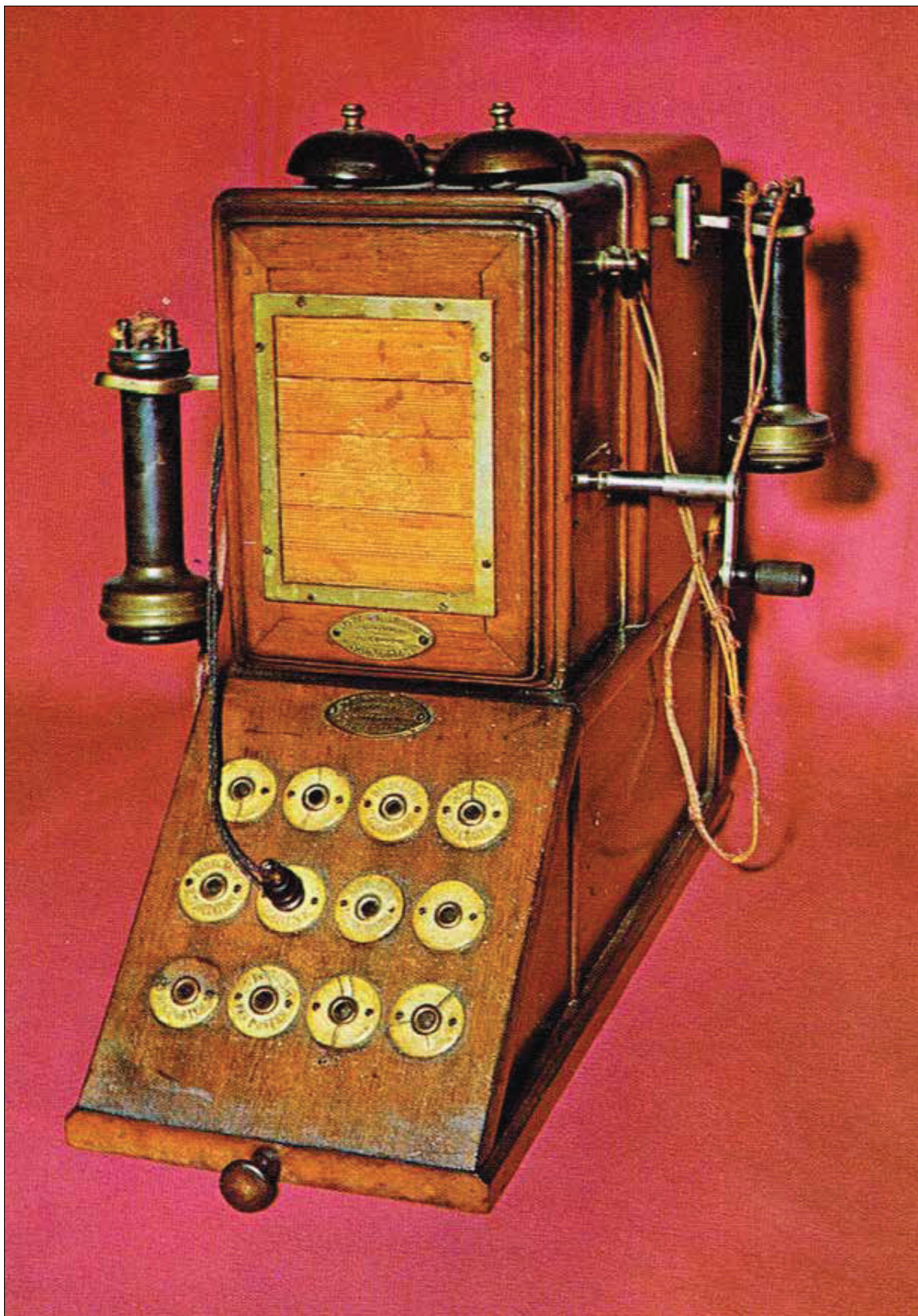


Fig. 1 - A beautiful Belgian telephone from around 1890. Source: postcard of the former Museum of Telephony & Telegraphy (via Fons Vanden Berghen)



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



Fig. 3 - Nameplate of the manufacturer

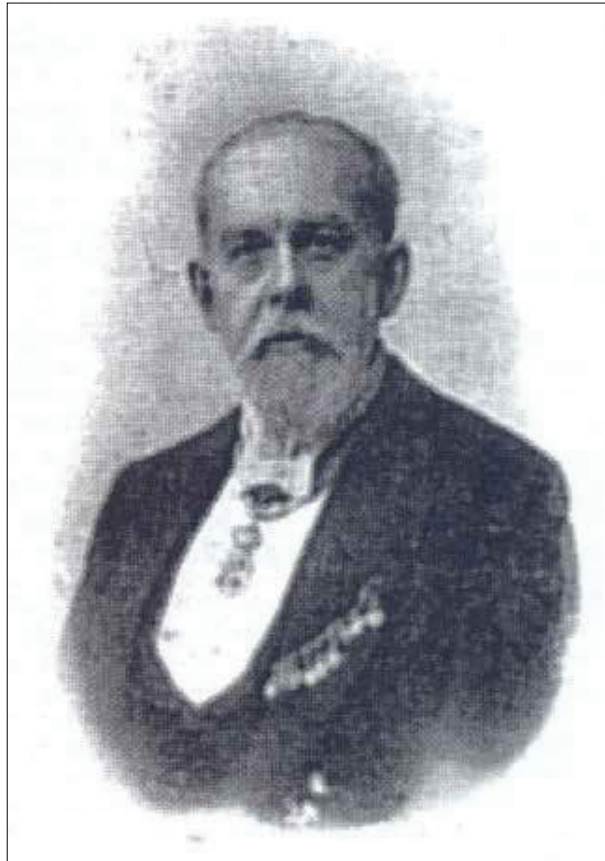


Fig. 4 - Charles Murlon (1851-1932)
Source www.geneanet.org

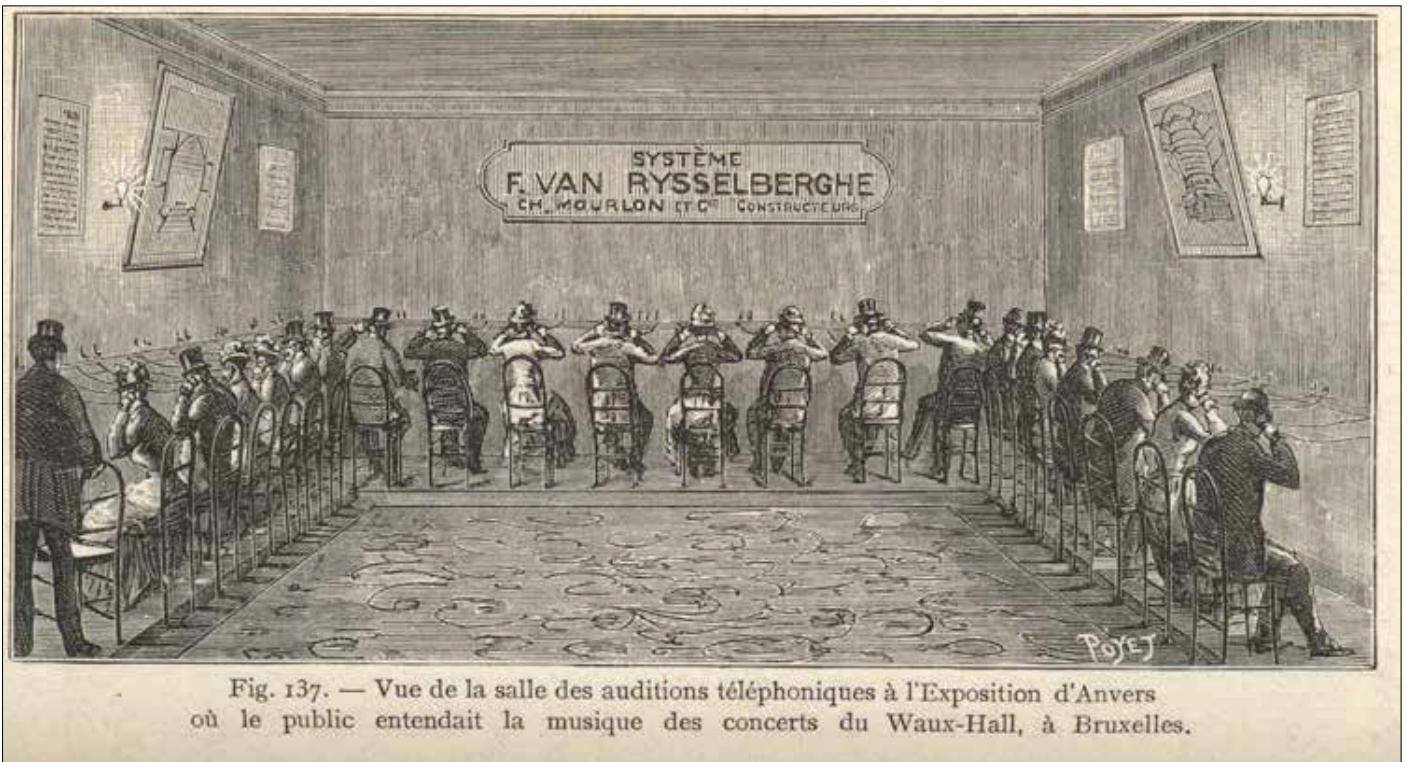


Fig. 137. — Vue de la salle des auditions téléphoniques à l'Exposition d'Anvers où le public entendait la musique des concerts du Waux-Hall, à Bruxelles.

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

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

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LUMIÈRE ÉLECTRIQUE

LAMPES A INCANDESCENCE ET A ARC VOLTAIQUE

LAMPES NOTHOMB

Machines dynamo-électriques de Meritens

PILES LECLANCHÉ

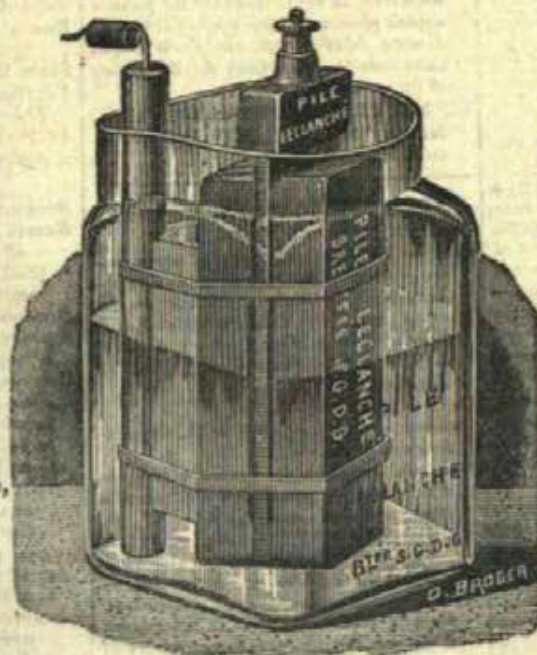
SEULES PILES

employées par
L'International Bell Telephone
Company

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et

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



SEULES PILES

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Gouvernements de l'Europe et de
l'Amérique
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En Belgique, plus de
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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

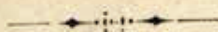
Isolateurs divers. — Câbles souterrains pour téléphones. — Câbles pour lumière électrique, etc., etc.

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



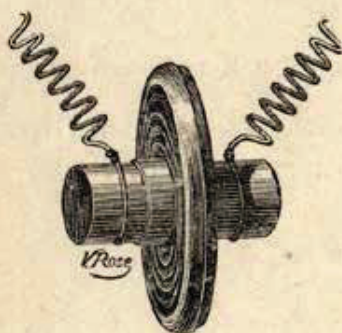
LES

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Bureaux centraux
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Fils et câbles conducteurs
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PARIS

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