



# THE GALPIN SOCIETY

FOR THE STUDY OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

NEWSLETTER NO. 63

SUMMER 2022

**New Acquisitions  
by the Musical  
Instrument  
Collection at the  
University of  
Edinburgh  
(see p.6)**



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# THE GALPIN SOCIETY

Registered Charity no. 306012

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The *Galpin Society Newsletter* is edited by Lance Whitehead and copy-edited by Maggie Kilbey. Opinions expressed by authors in this newsletter are not specifically endorsed by The Galpin Society.

**Page 1:** Viola by William Ferguson, Edinburgh, 1804, MIMEd 6619, flanked by Violins by David Stirrat, Edinburgh, 1814, MIMEd 6616 (reddish varnish) and Thomas Hardie, Edinburgh, 1846, MIMEd 6617 (light brown varnish). *Photo: Jenny Nex*

## Slow delivery of the Journal within the European Union

We are sorry for the delay in the delivery of *The Galpin Society Journal* Vol.75 (2022) to some members.

In July 2021 the European Union decided to start charging VAT / IVA on all postal items coming into the EU, even those of small commercial value. Formerly only imports over 22 Euros in value attracted tax.

To avoid a situation where subscribers might have to pay VAT or other fees on their journals, or have to make a trip to the post office to collect them, we now use a mailing house based in Belgium to send the journal to members in the EU. Unfortunately, this service, though reliable, is very slow and it can take up to two months instead of the normal two weeks for journals to arrive. However, some members in Europe have now received their journals already, so it is just a matter of time.

If a Journal is lost in transit, we will of course replace it.

**Chris Goodwin**  
Administrator

# EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Summer issue of the Galpin Society Newsletter. Firstly, it contains two excellent articles: ‘The Documentary Evidence of Bristol’s Portable Street Barrel Piano Makers, Part 2’ by Nick Nourse (with additional research by Tim Israel); and ‘On the Shoulders of Giants: Harpsichord Making Today, Part 1’ by Curtis Price. Both contain lots of fascinating information concerning their respective topics.

The Newsletter also contains important information concerning the Galpin Society Conference, which will be held in Edinburgh from Thursday 23 to Saturday 25 June, with a welcome reception on the evening of Wednesday 22 June. The meeting will be hosted by the University of Edinburgh and will be centred on St Cecilia’s Hall, the location of the University’s Musical Instrument Museum. The keynote speaker will be Stephen Cottrell, whose presentation is entitled ‘Musical Instruments and Object Biographies: Charlie Parker, Massey Hall, and Grafton 10265’. With more than 40 presentations, with topics ranging from ‘Brass playing at the Moravian settlement at Fulneck, Yorkshire, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ (Alexander McGrattan), to ‘Revisiting the “Social Life of Musical Instruments”’ (Simon Waters) to ‘New Light on the career of John Chappington, Elizabethan organ-maker’ (Michael Gale), it promises to be a hugely stimulating event. There will also be demonstrations, a conference banquet, and a special excursion trip to the Dick Institute, Kilmarnock, on Sunday 26 June. On the evening of Saturday 25 June there will be a concert at St Cecilia’s Hall: *I Pifferi del Doge* – Music in Venice between the Middle Ages and Renaissance, given by ‘Inventio’ under the direction of Ian Harrison. Works by Dunstable, Binchois, Obrecht, Busnois and others will be played on shawms, slide trumpets, sackbuts, historical bagpipes and percussion.

Please also note that the 2022 Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 25 June at 3pm in the Reid Concert Hall, Edinburgh. This will include the election of Officers and Committee members.

Finally, articles have already started to be submitted for consideration for Vol.76 (2023) of *The Galpin Society Journal*. The deadline is 1 June 2022, and due to the length of time needed to complete the peer review and editorial process no articles will be accepted after this date. It should also be noted that for those requiring their articles to be made Open Access, there is an associated fee of £500 payable to The Galpin Society at the time of publication.

**Lance Whitehead**

## **2022 Anthony Baines Memorial Prize**

The Galpin Society is delighted to announce that the twenty-fourth Anthony Baines Memorial Prize will be conferred on Ken Moore, Curator Emeritus, Department of Musical Instruments at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. We hope that the ceremony will take place at the Galpin Society Conference in Edinburgh.



## CONFERENCE ON MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

**Edinburgh**  
**23–25 JUNE 2022**

The Galpin Society's biennial conference will be held in Edinburgh on Thursday 23 June, Friday 24 June and Saturday 25 June.

The meeting will be hosted by the University of Edinburgh and will be centred on St Cecilia's Hall Concert Room and Music Museum.

### **NOW OPEN FOR BOOKING**

The detailed programme for the Conference is now out on the Conference website:

<http://www.euchmi.ed.ac.uk/gxtp.html>

Booking for the conference, the associated concert, and accommodation at very favourable rates is now open.

A theme of the Conference is *Domestic Music Making and its Instruments*, however, the presentations will cover a wide range of organological topics with a good balance of keyboard, string, wind, etc. papers. The sessions will include over 40 presentations, delivered in person by organologists from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Japan, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, and USA. The keynote paper will be given by Stephen Cottrell (City, University of London). Each day there will be demonstrations of instruments from the University's collection. The programme also includes a welcome reception on Wednesday 22 June in the historic Edinburgh City Chambers, and a conference banquet.

A special excursion to visit the Lord Howard de Walden instrument collection in Kilmarnock has also been arranged for Sunday 26 June; this will be a morning and afternoon coach trip, with lunch provided.

There will be a prize for the best debut paper.

Participants may bring an accompanying person to the reception and book additional places at the banquet. Note: accommodation is limited – bookings and payments should be made by 19 May.

For further information on the Conference or the AGM, please contact Arnold Myers:

**Arnold Myers**  
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**The Galpin Society**  
**74<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting**  
**Saturday 25 June 2022 at 3.00pm**  
**Reid Concert Hall, Edinburgh**



**AGENDA**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 73rd AGM, 26 June 2021 (on Zoom)
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. Chairman's report
5. Editor's report
6. Journal Editor's report
7. Reviews Editors' report
8. Newsletter Editor's report
9. Advertising Manager's report
10. Archivist's report
11. Administrator's report
12. The adoption of the examined accounts of the society for the year ending 31 March 2022
13. Election of the Independent Examiner (Accounts)
14. Election of Officers:
  - Chairman
  - Vice-Chairman
  - Advertising Manager
  - Reviews Editor(s)
  - Minutes Secretary
  - Archivist
  - Administrator
15. Election of committee member(s)
16. AoB

## Acquisitions news from the University of Edinburgh

The Musical Instrument Collection at the University of Edinburgh has recently acquired four instruments that were made in Scotland. They are:

Viola by William Ferguson, Edinburgh, 1804

Violin by David Stirrat, Edinburgh, 1814

Violin by Thomas Hardie, Edinburgh, 1846

Violin by Alexander Murdoch, Aberdeen, 1873

William Fergusson (1769–post 1816) is one of the earliest known Edinburgh violin makers, with similarities between his work and that of both Matthew Hardie and John Blair.<sup>1</sup> His premises were on St Mary's Wynd, a road that ran between the High Street and Cowgate. This viola appears to be one of his earliest surviving instruments and has a rich, mellow tone. David Stirrat (1768–post 1826) probably came originally from Ayrshire but spent his youth in Glasgow before settling in Edinburgh. He traded from various premises along the High Street and may have acted as an outworker for Matthew Hardie in his later years.<sup>2</sup> The violin is in particularly good condition, showing little wear and tear. Thomas Hardie (1803–56) learnt his trade with his father Matthew in early nineteenth-century Edinburgh and was also located on the High Street. Although they based their patterns on Italian instruments, the Hardies developed their own individual style, building their instruments up from the back rather than using a mould. Thomas suffered financial troubles at various points, being forced to sell his stock to the Glen family and then to work in their employ, being paid £2 for each completed violin.<sup>3</sup> This is a fine violin with a close-grained table and a sweet sound. The Aberdonian Alexander Murdoch (1815–91) lived for many years in Glenbucket where, according to census returns, he worked

as a cart and plough wright before turning to house carpentry and finally to violin making.<sup>4</sup> The instrument has high arching, reminiscent of that found in Norwegian *hardingfele*, suggesting a link between these northern fiddle-making traditions. The varnish has a striking, almost purplish, sheen, notably bringing out the figure in the back. The instrument sings particularly well in the hands of Scottish fiddlers, perhaps pointing to the genre for which it was designed.

We are delighted to add to our holdings of instruments made in Scotland, particularly from makers who were based within half a mile of their instrument's new home. All of these instruments are in good playing order in modern set up so will be used in performances at St Cecilia's Hall.

**Jenny Nex**

Jenny.Nex[at]ed.ac.uk

Back of Violin by Alexander Murdoch, Aberdeen, 1873, MIMEd 6618.

*Photo: Jenny Nex*



<sup>1</sup> David Rattray, *Violin Making in Scotland, 1750–1950* (Oxford: BVMA, 2006), pp.68–79.

<sup>2</sup> Rattray (2006), p.62, illustrated p.64.

<sup>3</sup> Rattray (2006), pp.52–6.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.patrickpeople.scot/not%20family/26508.htm>

## On the Shoulders of Giants: Harpsichord Making Today: Part I

The new millennium has seen significant development in harpsichord building based on historical models. Despite a saturated market, the finest makers of today have long waiting lists for their instruments which may be some of the best ever made. This article focusses on two makers from different generations – Martin Skowronek and Matthias Griewisch – to assess how philosophy and craftsmanship have changed and developed in recent years in a profession that aspires to move back in time rather than forward. This study takes a close look at certain aspects of construction, an approach which led to my choice of these particular makers: one wrote a frank and unexpurgated book on his methods, while the other granted me complete access to his praxis.

### Modern historical perspective

Although the instruments which are discussed below can be played, photographed, measured and generally admired, discovering how they were made is a challenge. Most harpsichord makers are not secretive about their methods and many welcome visitors to their workshops, though perhaps not when sawing out keys or shooting a mitre joint. Yet the journey from a stack of undressed timber to a singing masterpiece is surprisingly difficult to trace and has rarely been documented. In the modern era, the journey was first attempted by Frank Hubbard (1920–1976) in his magisterial book *Three Centuries of Harpsichord Making* (1965).<sup>1</sup> Now an historical artefact itself, the book continues to exert a strong influence on harpsichord makers. Any pioneering study is bound to have gaps; for example, Hubbard includes no account of Vaudry, later to be

rediscovered as a maker of considerable importance; and Dulcken, amongst the greatest of all makers, is mentioned only in passing.

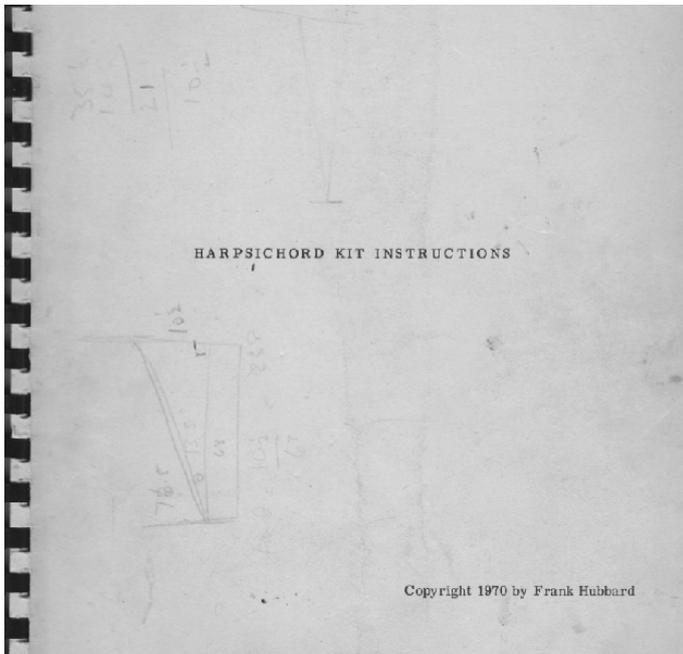
Hubbard's descriptions of instruments are generalised and not detailed. One could hardly learn how to build a copy of a Taskin or a Kirkman from reading his book, despite the beautifully drawn plates and reconstruction of an eighteenth-century instrument maker's workshop. In terms of the technical detail with which the present study is principally concerned, Hubbard's more important contribution is the typescript instruction manual he wrote to accompany his kit, for which he is now better known than for his own shop instruments (see Figure 1). The kit started production in the early 1960s as a simplified version of a mid-eighteenth-century French double – 2x8ft, 1x4ft, coupled, with buff stop – but by its second or third iteration in 1973 could result in a sophisticated concert instrument after a 1769 Taskin, even better if one updated the stringing list for iron wire, modified the framing and action and took pains over the stand and decoration.<sup>2</sup> In the manual one will find a wealth of detail about many aspects of construction not mentioned in the book but which Hubbard had gleaned from restoring and copying old instruments. Its main limitation, apart from the fact that it was never separately published (obviously for commercial reasons), is that it has little to say about those critical components (such as drawings, keyboards, jacks, registers, bentside, bridges and soundboard) which were supplied with the kit ready-made or roughly sized.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Hubbard, *Three Centuries of Harpsichord Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent account of the process, see Claudio Di Veroli, 'Improving an old Hubbard harpsichord kit', <https://harps.braybaroque.ie>, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Adam Swainson for providing me with a photograph of the front page of the very rare 1970 edition shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Hubbard kit instruction manual, front cover.

How Hubbard and his erstwhile partner William Dowd, who together founded the so-called Boston school of harpsichord building, made their own instruments is fairly well understood. From the reminiscences of their former colleagues and apprentices, as well as from my own experience, I can confidently say that their methods and instruments owed much less to those of the ancient makers than was once claimed.<sup>4</sup> The Boston school happily embraced quasi-piano factory techniques, employing specialist joiners for case-building, sometimes outsourcing keyboards, designing moulded plastic jacks and typically opting for construction methods and materials, including plywood cases, which they hoped would assure tuning stability. Despite these and other modernisms, such as plexiglass lower guides and some metal parts (gap spacers and capstan screws for limiting the movement of the registers),<sup>5</sup> the best of the

Boston school instruments were a revelation to players and audiences used to the metal-framed harpsichords of Pleyel et Cie and John Challis.

About the same time the Boston school was gathering momentum, in Germany Martin Skowroneck and Rainer Schütze also began to build historically based harpsichords, both being inspired and guided by Hubbard's book. Though he had at least as much hands-on experience with old instruments as Hubbard and was intimate with the keyboard collection of the Berlin Musikinstrumenten-Museum, Skowroneck's earliest harpsichords, indeed almost all that followed, were rarely exact copies of originals. He abhorred the volume production and factory approach of the Boston school. Whereas Hubbard came to regard the 1764/83 Goermans/Taskin double as the ultimate harpsichord, Skowroneck fell in love with the Flemish sound, which remained his *ne plus ultra* throughout a long and productive career. I would say that the best of his early instruments, those made around 1965, and especially the muselar virginals, were the first of the modern era which could ravish listeners, causing us to exclaim, 'Oh, so that's the way a harpsichord should sound!'

After *Three Centuries of Harpsichord Making*, the next milestone is Grant O'Brien's *Ruckers: A harpsichord and virginal building tradition* (1990), an exhaustive and meticulous survey of this famous family of instrument makers. This book explains in great detail how the instruments were made – methods, techniques, jigs and tools. This had never been done before in any study of historical instrument making. With this book in hand, a skilled craftsman with musical training and a good ear can build a

<sup>4</sup> *The Boston School of Harpsichord Building: Reminiscences of William Dowd, Eric Herz and Frank Hubbard by the People Who Knew and Worked with Them*, ed. Mark Kroll, Historical Harpsichord Series No. 7 (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2019). As a PhD student I worked as Hubbard's assistant curating the Harvard University historic keyboard collection, 1967–73, tuned and regulated for Dowd during this period and was sporadically apprenticed to one-time Hubbard journeyman William Post Ross in 1969–71.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that even original Ruckers harpsichords used hand-made screws to 'provide a variable amount of friction between the leather and the top of the registers'. See Grant O'Brien, *Ruckers: A harpsichord and virginal building tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.113.

reasonably faithful reproduction of a Ruckers-Couchet family harpsichord or virginal. For Skowroneck, who was already well along this road, and for several others of his and the next generation, O'Brien's book became the bible. Herein could be found the old testament secrets of laying out, scalings and bridge manufacture and, if not quite revealing the holy grail of the Ruckers sound, how to prepare, shape and support a soundboard. The technical detail is astonishing, and the book inspired several fine makers to adopt the old methods and techniques which O'Brien had uncovered.

Although there were several other fine makers of his generation who were eventually capable of producing instruments of equal or perhaps even superior quality, Martin Skowroneck (1926–2014) has achieved almost god-like status. Gustav Leonhardt and other virtuosi championed his harpsichords, which never went out of fashion when the epigones began nipping at his heels. Even his best instruments have their flaws, but they also bear the stamp of a single author with a very fine ear.<sup>6</sup> Early in his career, Skowroneck did not encourage other makers to visit his workshop,<sup>7</sup> yet he wrote a book towards the end of his life – *Cembalobau: Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse aus der Werkstattpraxis* (2003)<sup>8</sup> – in which he claims to reveal everything there is to know about how he builds harpsichords; his only secrets, he says, are failed experiments. He takes as his main exemplars an early seventeenth-century Italian harpsichord and a slightly later single-manual harpsichord by Ruckers. The detail he provides,

based on what he learned from O'Brien, his own study of museum instruments and years of experience and experiment, is sufficient for that 'skilled craftsman with musical training and a good ear' to build a harpsichord in the manner of Skowroneck. He writes informally, sometimes sardonically, but precisely about tools and jigs, preparation of timber and other materials, techniques and – most helpfully – pitfalls. Yet he was hardly bound by traditional methods or by what he had learned from studying old instruments. It is somewhat surprising, given Skowroneck's considerable achievement, that Matthias Griewisch and other present-day makers have adopted neither his philosophy nor many of the methods described in *Cembalobau*.

Darryl Martin's *The Art of Making a Harpsichord* (2012)<sup>9</sup> is as important as Hubbard or O'Brien to any historically orientated maker. It is a documentary study in as much as Martin treats the instruments themselves, particularly several early seventeenth-century Italian originals, as his documents. His central purpose is to show that one can succeed perfectly well using only the tools and deduced methods of an historical workshop assuming, however, that ancient makers were able to source some wood which was already re-sawn and dressed by specialist suppliers. Based on his experience in conserving and restoring old harpsichords, working alongside O'Brien and John Barnes, and making his own reproductions, Martin has written a detailed and richly illustrated instruction manual which rediscovers and where necessary invents plausible methods, tools and

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Kroll relates the story of a New York technician who owned a Skowroneck harpsichord which he rented out. It apparently had problems: 'the mortises in the jack registers were so sloppy and loose that when he would place the instrument on Carnegie Hall's quite significantly angled stage, one entire register would fall so far from the string that it didn't play at all [...] he had to put individual shims into each slot to fix the problem, and was so angry that he wrote to the builder: "Dear Mr. Skowroneck, We Americans like things that work. Your harpsichord doesn't." He received no reply. (Letter to the author dated 5 August 2020.)

<sup>7</sup> When Matthias Griewisch asked if he could visit the workshop in the early 1980s, Skowroneck brushed him aside: 'Nothing special to see'. Letter to the author, 23 November 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Skowroneck, *Cembalobau: Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse aus der Werkstattpraxis* (Bergkirchen: Edition Bochinsky, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Darryl Martin, *The Art of Making a Harpsichord* (London: Robert Hale, 2012).

jigs which a skilled maker can use in creating faithful reproductions. This book is a practical application of what O'Brien discovered about Ruckers, though focused mainly on Italian rather than Flemish harpsichords. The contrast with Skowroneck's methods and philosophy can be striking, as will be seen below.

Although Skowroneck never dogmatically applied historical methods, he did follow some of the principles that O'Brien distilled from Ruckers, and which Martin articulates in *The Art of Making a Harpsichord*. Accordingly, he first drew a plan of the entire instrument starting with the natural key-fronts to fit the chosen octave span. Scalings begin from Pythagorean principles and are then modified by foreshortening in the bass: that is, strings of a given pitch-class double in length for every octave descending until the exponential increase needs to be reined in by using progressively thicker wire to avoid an enormously long case. Although he undoubtedly measured the scalings and plucking points of old instruments, Skowroneck did not admit to copying them exactly. Following him, many modern makers also start by drawing plans and elevations and working out their own scalings, plucking points, stringing lists, etc. However, unless one follows a demonstrably good original pretty closely, this approach will inevitably involve trial and error spread over successive instruments.

Skowroneck made the registers and guides first, cutting kerfs in the blanks to mark the distal key-centres which were later enlarged into the mortices for the jacks; the blanks were clamped together and all scored with one pass through a

table-saw.<sup>10</sup> An extra batten was scored at the same time to be used as a marking-out stick from which the bridge-pin positions were located as measured at right angles from the spine. Griewisch too lays out his instruments from the spine with a calibrated rule, and thus the registers and guides come very early in the construction process.

Skowroneck devotes several pages to describing his Ruckers-style jacks. Any wooden jack is difficult to make accurately enough to assure reliability, and his seem to have proved to be something of an Achilles' heel, which is surprising for so fine a craftsman. What he found problematic, apart from punching the mortices for the plectra without splitting the tongue blanks, was drilling the holes for the axle pin through the jack tines and tongue, admittedly the most difficult part of the process.<sup>11</sup> While it is unknown exactly how old jacks were made, thickening and slot-cutting jigs with shims must have been involved.<sup>12</sup> Even with his own carefully designed jigs to hold the tongue in the correct position for drilling, Skowroneck found that the very fine bit (typically 0.6mm or less in diameter) would deflect, thereby causing the tongue to be slightly cross-ways in its slot and liable to jam during operation (see Figure 2).<sup>13</sup> One solution, which Skowroneck did not appear to hit upon, is to drill through only one tine and the tongue, stopping short of the second tine. After the hole through the tongue has been slightly enlarged, the sharp end of the axle pin is inserted and positioned lightly against the far tine to assure the tongue is properly aligned and moves freely; the pin can then be pressed into the other tine a millimetre

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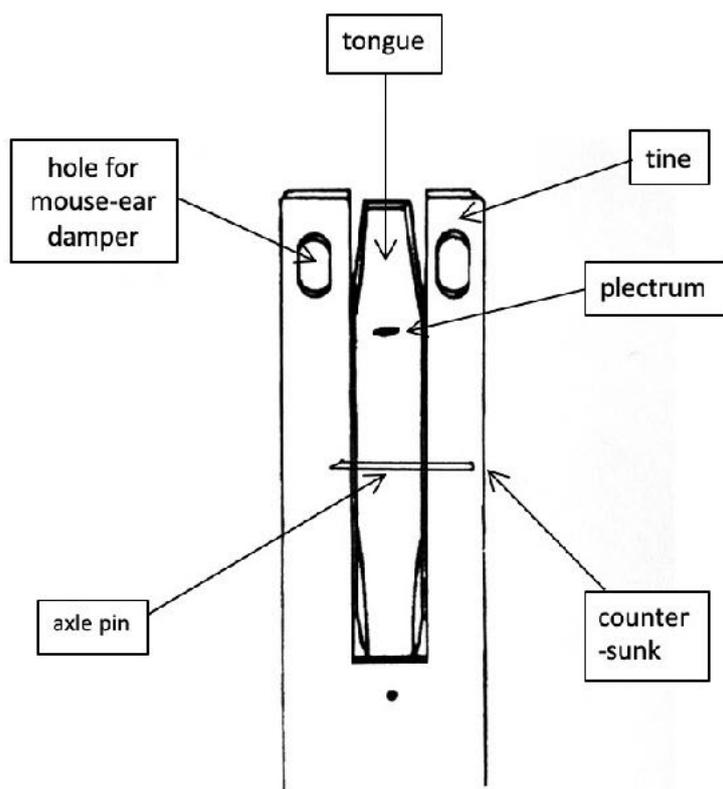
<sup>10</sup> '[...] I make my register guides before anything else, so I can take all the necessary measurements directly from them.' Skowroneck (2003), p.169.

<sup>11</sup> To avoid splitting tongues, Grant O'Brien suggests punching the plectra holes into the holly strip before it is sawn up into individual tongues. The holes are therefore never close to an edge during punching. Private correspondence with the author.

<sup>12</sup> Martin (2012), pp.66–67.

<sup>13</sup> 'Unfortunately, drilling both jack and tongue in one turn does not work in practice, as the drill will not keep straight all the way through.' Skowroneck (2003), p.162.

so to secure it. Because the pin cannot be removed once cut flush with the tine and slightly counter-sunk, the jack, which might have taken a couple of hours to make, must be considered expendable if something goes wrong with the tongue (for example, if it breaks during voicing or becomes gummed up with oil seeping down from a feather plectrum).



**Figure 2.** Ruckers-style jack with irremovable axle.

Skowroneck persisted in making wooden jacks because he regarded them as the historically orientated maker's responsibility but is unapologetic about a daringly a-historical feature intended to improve reliability: that is, suspending the back of the keyboard from the upper belly-rail on aluminium hooks, leaving a few millimetres clearance underneath, so that if the baseboard heaves upwards with changes in

temperature and humidity, the plectra will remain in the same position relative to the strings. He regarded this as the less venal of two modernisms, the other being jack-adjustment screws which would make the same correction. But, he writes, screws 'often lead to problems, as any accessible regulation aids have a magical effect on most owners, leading them to regulate all the time – often in the wrong direction'.<sup>14</sup> Human nature can lead even the finest makers to blame the customer for their mistakes or the problems all harpsichords will inevitably suffer from season to season. Skowroneck was hardly a dogmatic 'authenticist'. 'In my opinion, a historically made harpsichord, which does not work well, is not only a nuisance to the owner and the builder, but concerns [i.e., reflects badly on] everyone who builds historically.'<sup>15</sup> Griewisch and his peers would never dream of using either jack-adjustment screws or suspending their key-frames on metal brackets. Rather, as we will see, they are confident that their cases, built of well-seasoned timber and with very high quality joinery, will be stable enough to cope with changes in temperature and humidity.

The most intriguing part of Skowroneck's treatise is the discussion of soundboards – the heart of a Ruckers and, so it would seem, of a Skowroneck too. From his ideas about preparing, selecting and jointing strips of spruce, thickening, planing, bracing and gluing up, a philosophy emerges. He railed against those for whom 'a detail is regarded as the single most important cause of the quality of the whole instrument'.<sup>16</sup> Yet he was also deeply superstitious about his soundboards and worried, for example, that the fibres might be accidentally compressed by the feed rollers when

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.203.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.233.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.153.

the constituent strips are run through a planer.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Skowronek was quite relaxed about such things as thickening and ribs in Italian instruments but regarded Ruckers's strong 4ft hitch-pin rail, cut-off bar and ribs as 'an unbelievable miracle. Here, acoustics and static [rigidity] are combined ideally [...]'<sup>18</sup> Thus his credo: 'The wood properties are best felt when planing the soundboard by hand, and here one can simultaneously react without a detour during the working process. The interaction of string, bridge, width and thickness of the soundboard is best imagined three-dimensionally, to understand it and to come to well-aimed decisions.'<sup>19</sup> Skowronek was sceptical about making new instruments as 'authentic' as possible or even as 'correctly' as possible. This 'not only hinders the creativity necessary for good results, it also restricts one's power of observation and judgement. Thus, faults in an original (and these exist!) might be copied along with the rest'.<sup>20</sup> Yet, amid all the rich detail, gentle admonitions, debunking of rivals and paying obeisance to the scientific method, Skowronek could not tell us how technique translates into masterpiece, only that it must be 'felt'.

### Matthias Griewisch

By common consent in the early music world, Matthias Griewisch (b. 1959) is one of the most successful makers of the post-Skowronek generation.<sup>21</sup> But this is not a club whose members follow the same rules. They fall into perhaps four sub-classes according to their different methods and philosophies: 1) those who build reproductions of minimally restored

original instruments, making and doing everything themselves except perhaps soundboard decoration and lid painting; 2) those who build close copies but outsource certain components; 3) those who make instruments inspired by originals but with a freedom restrained only by the extreme limits of historical precedent and the science of acoustics; 4) those who attempt to correct the perceived faults of old instruments and aim for a highly machined, faultless finish. As we will see, Griewisch does not fit exactly into any of these categories.

He served as apprentice and journeyman to Martin Sassmann and worked for Rainer Schütze and William Jurgenson before gaining a distinction as a master instrument maker from the Handwerkskammer für Mittelfranken in Nürnberg in 1989. Although not unique among luthiers, what drew Griewisch to the profession was that he started as a harpsichordist and organist (at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin) and then discovered and refined his parallel skills as wood carver and cabinet maker. He begins every instrument from the player's point of view and with the music in mind.

Griewisch began his career by making almost everything from scratch, fully aware that harpsichord building requires many skills of disparate kinds: draughtsmanship; geometry; tonal design and scaling; timber sourcing and preparation; joinery and cabinetry; marquetry; carving; metallurgy and casting; wire drawing; tuning and temperament; lettering; fine-art painting and decoration; quilling and voicing. But no individual can have absolute command of

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<sup>17</sup> 'This is an intuitive decision and cannot be provided by hard facts.' *Ibid.*, p.182. Yet Martin (2012), p.99, notes that great care must be taken when passing spruce or fir through a planer/thicknesser, as 'the wood can easily shatter when the pieces are this thin'.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.239–40.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.267.

<sup>21</sup> See 'References' and 'Discography' at [www.griewisch.com](http://www.griewisch.com). His waiting time (as of February 2022) is four years, though he keeps some gaps for developing new instruments and filling commissions from conservatoires.

all these disciplines, and the best instruments of even the most famous ancient makers were the products of several hands in a clear division of labour – the master (or the person whose name appears on the jack-rail or above the keys), journeymen, apprentices and other craftsmen and artists within and without the workshop.<sup>22</sup> Ruckers and Couchet appear to have focused their personal attention on assuring a reliable action and were soundboard wizards; indeed, during *grand ravalement*, everything might be discarded or altered beyond recognition except the soundboard. In the late eighteenth century, the quality of Kirkman's harpsichords as furniture is on a par with his contemporary Chippendale and, as such, his instruments were probably products of the factory system in the best sense of the term.

Yet, for someone who works entirely alone, the aim of achieving perfection is paradoxical. If no one can completely master all the harpsichord trades, outsourcing of certain parts and tasks must be contemplated if the highest level overall is to be attained. Skrowoneck's harpsichords are therefore by their very nature imperfect, which is part of their charm. Of course, outsourcing is not just about assuring better quality work than one can do oneself; it also involves economics. Jacks, for example, if made of wood along historical lines, take longer than any other single part of the instrument, with the possible exception of the keyboard, depending on one's priorities. Little wonder that makers from at least the early seventeenth century to the present day have bought in their jacks and even occasionally (heaven forbid!) their keyboards or parts thereof.<sup>23</sup> Skowroneck believed that to call oneself a 'harpsichord maker', one must be able competently to handle at least the musically

critical aspects of the job which include laying out, forming the bentside, case construction, soundboard jointing and thickening, bridge profiling, sawing out the keyboard, voicing and jack making. That few if any of the great seventeenth- and eighteenth-century makers could have done all these things to an equally high standard raises an interesting philosophical question, yet one we would never ask about nineteenth- and twentieth-century piano makers.

For his early instruments, Griewisch made everything but the wire – jacks, bridge pins, hand-forged tuning pins, stands, cases and decoration. The first 30 or so were quilled with bird feathers, and his French and Flemish-style jacks had boar bristle springs. Purists may criticize Griewisch and others of his ilk for eventually outsourcing jacks, case decoration, case carving and turned or fluted legs for the stands, but these are a means to attain the highest overall quality and should not lessen their achievement.

Griewisch says that he has been particularly influenced by the books of Hubbard, O'Brien and Jean Tournay, musicologists who also happened to be harpsichord makers. But the strongest influence on his work comes from close examination of old instruments. His own are accordingly based on the best preserved originals of famous makers – Andreas and Ioannes Ruckers, Johan Daniel Dulcken, Albertus Delin, Pierre Donzelague, Pascal Taskin, Jean-Antoine Vaudry, Michael Mietke, Christian Zell, Dominicus Pisarenensis, Onofrio Guarracino, Giovanni Battista Giusti, Aelpidio Gregori and others – but they are not exact reproductions. The exemplars are of course measured, minutely examined and photographed, but the new

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<sup>22</sup> See Martin (2012), pp.34–35, for an overview of the historical workshop.

<sup>23</sup> O'Brien (1990, p.53) writes that, in addition to jacks, keyboard sharp blocks were not made in the Ruckers workshops. Martin (2012, p.35) goes further: buying in 'may also have extended to keytops (natural and accidental), jacks, tuning pins, hinges and stands'.

instruments are drawn afresh. Whereas Skowroneck would not hesitate to move bridge and nut positions, Griewisch meticulously follows original scalings and plucking points, only changing these when guided by his ear and experience. As regards our principal focus, manufacture, his workshop is equipped with fine hand and power tools, with the notable exception of a sanding machine, which is anathema to his aesthetic and hence the look of his instruments.<sup>24</sup> Prominent in his workshop is a 1981 model Marunaka Super Surfacer, a big industrial sized planer with a fixed, non-rotating blade. All wooden components are prepared and cut out from high quality timber which has been air-dried for at least ten years. Milling and machining leaves all parts just oversize, and then absolutely everything is hand-planed, scraped, filed and chiselled down (but never sanded) for final fitting and assembly with hide or fish glue. It might seem anachronistic to use modern heavy artillery on so refined and delicate an object as a harpsichord, but one cannot say that his finished instruments look over-machined.

Griewisch devotes more time and attention to the keyboard than to anything else, it being the interface between the player and the instrument. Here he departs sharply from Skowroneck, who treats keyboards almost as an afterthought: 'In spite of the spontaneous impression, the keyboard belongs to the less complicated parts of a harpsichord.'<sup>25</sup> Yet it is well to remember Hubbard's view: 'Of all the parts of the harpsichord the keyboard imposes the most stringent demand on the maker's

manual technique.'<sup>26</sup> The keyboards and keywells of Griewisch's instruments are certainly beautiful but not perhaps superior in their various parts (touch-plates, sharps, arcades and end-blocks) to a handful of the other fine makers; nor are they so formidably grand and aristocratic as to intimidate a jobbing continuo player.

To get some idea of the style and direction of Griewisch's recent work and to assess how it relates to Skowroneck and the historical makers, I now consider certain aspects of two instruments based on the Flemish and Italian models which are also the focus of *Cembalobau*.<sup>27</sup>

### **Double-manual after Dulcken 1745**

Johan Daniel Dulcken stands at the end of the long era of Flemish harpsichord hegemony. Charles Burney famously pronounced him the greatest maker after the Ruckers-Couchet dynasty.<sup>28</sup> In his big doubles, one can clearly hear the noble Ruckers sound – the long scale supported by thick case sides, a powerful bass, reedy tenor and silvery treble. But Dulcken also opened the door to a new harpsichord ideal, more powerful and able reach the back row of a large hall. He achieved this power not only with a bigger, longer instrument but also with a new case design with its novel double thickness bentside and secondary bentside liner (see Figure 5).<sup>29</sup> No wonder that Leonhardt, after admiring Skowroneck's early Italian models, commissioned him to make a copy of a Dulcken. Similar copies by various makers have been the favourite of many soloists ever since. But the

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<sup>24</sup> Skowroneck, by contrast, was happy with a few old power tools, and visitors to his shop were surprised to see only a basic table-saw; Skowroneck (2003), p.155.

<sup>25</sup> Skowroneck (2003), p.193.

<sup>26</sup> Hubbard (1965), p.220.

<sup>27</sup> I am grateful to Matthias Griewisch for providing me with complete sets of photographs of several of his recent instruments at every stage of construction and for permission to reproduce some of them in this article. Much of what follows is drawn from our voluminous correspondence over the past few years and especially during the pandemic.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces* (London, 1773), p.28.

<sup>29</sup> O'Brien (1990, p.199) believes Dulcken's prototype was a similarly long instrument by Couchet now in Stockholm.

Flemish harpsichord was eventually eclipsed both in the eighteenth century and again in the modern era by the grand, opulent French design of the Parisian makers, principally Pascal Taskin. They are distinctly different sounds: the French rounded, even more silvery and perfumed; the Flemish grainier and pungent. And tastes do change.

Dulcken, like his Flemish forebears, built his cases 'from the outside in', that is, the walls are joined together and then rest on top of the baseboard. Italians and some early French and German instruments are built 'from the inside out', that is, thin case walls overlap the baseboard and are attached to frames and knees fixed to it. The bottom comes first; indeed, some Italian makers drew the frames and bridge and nut positions on it in pencil.<sup>30</sup> In a Flemish instrument the baseboard is attached much later. The longer scale and therefore considerably greater string tension characteristic of Flemish harpsichords require a very strongly built case with secure corner joints, frames dovetailed into the sides, and the wrestplank and belly-rails rebated into the cheek-piece and spine. The main challenges are forming the bentside (whether by wet ironing, flame heat or glue lamination) without it 'cupping' at the treble end (that is, warping so the outer surface becomes concave, which often happens when the plank has been soaked in water), and then attaching it to the cheek and tail-piece and somehow completely closing the joints during gluing up. A badly cupped bentside is almost impossible to rectify.<sup>31</sup> An added complication is that the upper case mouldings in the Flemish style, including Dulcken's, are scratched or

planed into the inside of the rim rather than being applied later as battens, therefore making butt joints at the bent-side impossible because the mouldings would not match. Mitred joints, on the other hand, would need to be nearly perfect to be strong enough for a long-scaled instrument and could slip during gluing up. Ruckers's solution was to make compound or so-called half-lapped joints: that is, the inside part with the moulding is mitred, whereas the outer part is lapped over to form a butt joint (see Figures 3 and 4).<sup>32</sup> Skowroneck regarded these joints as essential for strength but found them difficult to make, conceding self-deprecatingly that they are 'only useful for painted instruments, because even a very neat joint in the manner looks all too functional'.<sup>33</sup> It is also nearly impossible to prevent the ends of the treenails (or hand-made dowels) driven into the joints for reinforcement from eventually showing through the case decoration.

For his Dulcken case construction, Griewisch forms the rim mouldings with a router; previously he used moulding planes, some of which he made himself. Mouldings were traditionally cut with a scratch-stock, Skowroneck and Martin's preferred tool. (With a scratch-stock, the profile of the moulding is ground and filed into a thin piece of metal, such as a cabinet scraper, which is fixed securely between two matching wooden handles and then pushed and pulled along the workpiece, scratching in the profile of the moulding. A scratch-stock tends to work better with harder woods and is less effective with lime and poplar.)<sup>34</sup> The joint between the tail and spine can be a simple mitre whose acute angle

<sup>30</sup> See Martin (2012, p.107): '[...] almost like a drawing of the instrument which has been placed on the baseboard itself.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

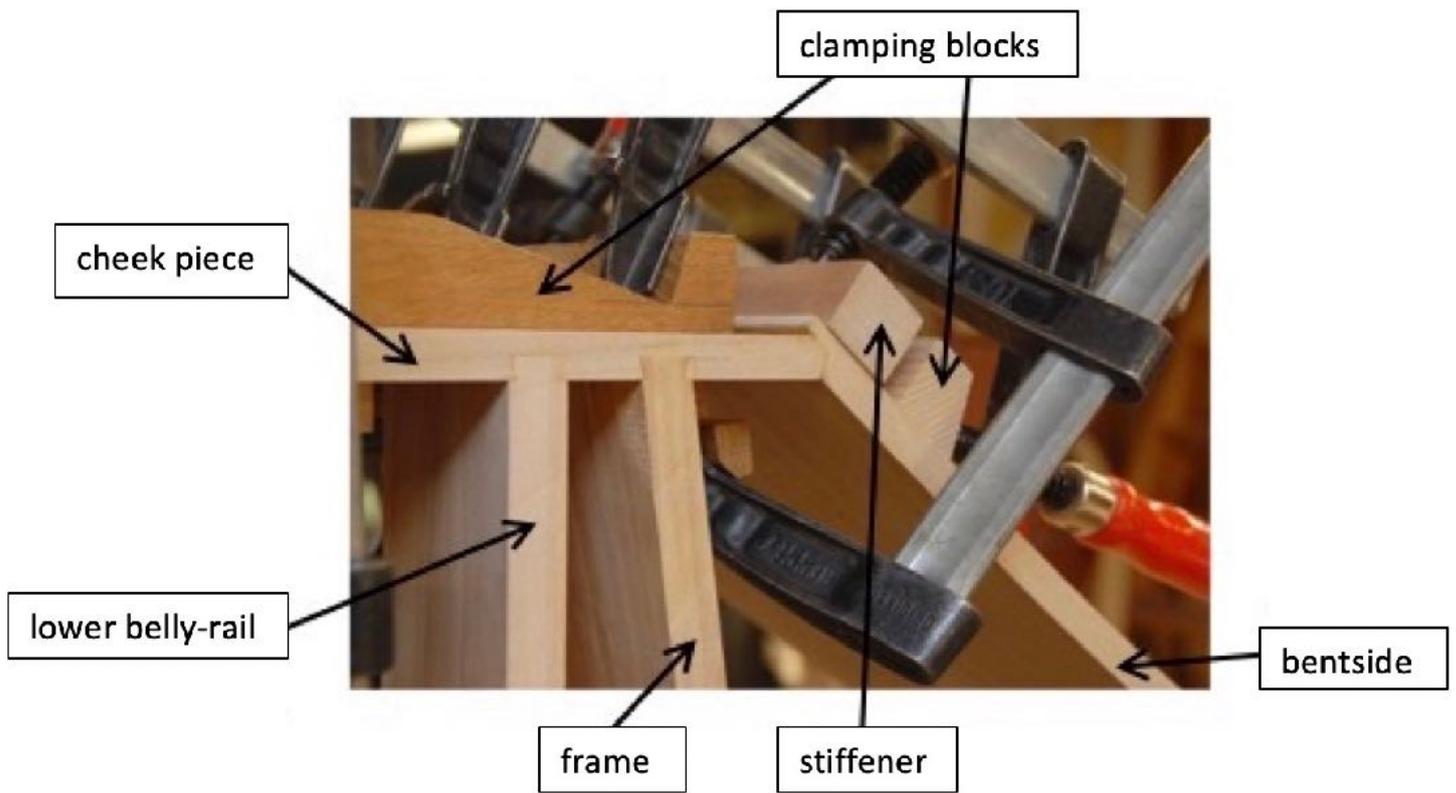
<sup>32</sup> 'This characteristic construction is one of the distinguishing features of a genuine Ruckers instrument which may be of help in identifying a counterfeit instrument'. O'Brien (1990), p.91. Delin and indeed Dulcken also used half-lapped joints.

<sup>33</sup> Skowroneck (2003), p.178.

<sup>34</sup> Skowroneck (2003, p.158) vividly describes the process: '... at the beginning, everything seems to lead towards a rough and uncontrolled disaster. But the deeper the scraping, the neater the moulding, until at last the block rests on the unmoulded surface.' See also Martin (2012), pp.110–11.

provides large gluing surfaces, but the half-lapped joints between tail and bentside and

bentside and cheek are more complicated, requiring four cuts each.



**Figure 3.** A clamped up half-lapped joint between cheek and bentside, viewed from below.



**Figure 4.** A similar half-lapped joint viewed from above.

Griewisch used to make the inside mitre cuts with a table-saw and the lapped joints with a Japanese wide-mouthed rebate plane. Eventually he learned to make the second cut also with a table-saw, but this requires holding the bentside precariously on end up in the air and guiding it carefully along the fence without wagging.<sup>35</sup> Skowroneck does not reveal exactly how he cut his half-laps but admits that ‘it is almost impossible to glue a prepared bentside exactly into place without it slipping ever so slightly’.<sup>36</sup> Makers of Flemish-style harpsichords may be familiar with this problem, which is only exacerbated by the bentside’s tendency to cup. Griewisch solves both problems by gluing temporary clamping blocks to the outer case walls on either side of all joints (see Figures 3 and 4). These blocks and a chunky stiffener at the treble end of the bentside are later cut off and planed flat.<sup>37</sup> The flaps are then cut off and made flush with the bentside. The resulting strong joints may obviate the need for treenails, and Griewisch’s finished exterior could be left exposed and varnished or treated with linseed oil like an Italian inner case were not Dulcken’s instruments always painted and decorated with gold leaf, thereby hiding any flaws in the joints.

The carrying power of a Dulcken largely stems from his ingenious double thickness bentside and secondary bentside liner. William Dowd restored the 1745 Smithsonian instrument to playing condition in 1960–1 and, thinking these features were a later addition, removed them.<sup>38</sup> This is the same Dulcken which Skowroneck copied for Leonhardt a year later but, not being in original condition, probably lacked the power it may once have had. In an unaltered original now in the Brussels Musical Instruments Museum, also dating from 1745, on which Griewisch based his new instrument, the soundboard sits free of the single bentside wall on a secondary liner (see Figure 5). This allows the 8ft hitch-pins to be driven into the outer liner and not through the soundboard, keeping it free from any string tension apart, that is, the 4ft, whose hitch-pins pass through the soundboard into the boudin. The double bentside liner and its supports result in an exceptionally strong case which, even without the full double bentside of other Dulckens, is nearly as stable as an early nineteenth-century piano, but with a ‘free-floating’ soundboard which amplifies the sound.

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<sup>35</sup> Letter to the author dated 15 May 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Skowroneck (2003), p.178.

<sup>37</sup> Martin (2012, pp.156–7) uses the same gluing blocks to assemble an Italian case, though the stiffeners are clamped rather than glued on to protect the bare wood from tearing out, which would be visible on an ‘inner-outer’ instrument.

<sup>38</sup> National Museum of American History, Behring Centre, ‘Dulcken Double Manual Harpsichord’, [https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_605990](https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_605990). Skowroneck (2003, p.264) confirms this: ‘the double wall on the inside had erroneously been removed as being not original.’



**Figure 5.** Doubled bentside soundboard liner of Griewisch after Dulcken.

In Part 2 (to be published in the next issue of the Newsletter), I consider the soundboard, keyboard and finished case of this Dulcken copy and then describe Griewisch's take on a sixteenth-century single-strung Neapolitan harpsichord.

**Curtis Price**

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## The Concertina Museum collection

Under the curatorship of Neil Wayne, the Concertina Museum has amassed a definitive collection of instruments and associated memorabilia, spanning the early 1800s to the modern day. Collected over the last 30 years, they illustrate the antecedents of the concertina and its evolution initially with the Wheatstone company, then with other makers who flourished in the later nineteenth century. These are illustrated and detailed online at: <http://concertinamuseum.com/>

There are almost 480 concertinas and related instruments from almost all known makers, selected for their original condition, and in many cases, their beauty and decorative aspects. It includes a key selection of related free reeded instruments from around the world, including many French *Accordéons Diatoniques*, German *Chemnitzers*, American *Bandoneons*, Dutch and Italian *melodeons*.

A crucial part of the Collection is the prototype and precursor instruments that Charles Wheatstone created in his workshops in the late 1820s – the *Symphonium* and *Aolina*. There is a highly significant grouping of Charles Wheatstone's research prototypes of his musical and scientific devices. This includes the William Wheatstone prototype instrument based on his 1861 Patent,<sup>1</sup> believed to be the only one ever made.



**Figure 1.** William Wheatstone,  
Patent English Concertina,  
London, c1861. Photo: Bill  
Crossland

The Documents, Images and Research Archive section of the Museum Collection presents the largest and most complete archive of *original* items related to Wheatstone, to the concertina, and its fascinating history and social mobility through the class structure of Britain.

The instruments have been extensively photographed and catalogued, and the ethos has been to conserve them in their original condition for future research and exhibition purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.concertinamuseum.com/Images/Non-Concertina\\_Items/102010-004a.jpg](https://www.concertinamuseum.com/Images/Non-Concertina_Items/102010-004a.jpg)



**Figure 2.** Louis Lachenal, English Concertina, London, c1863.  
*Photo: Bill Crossland*



**Figure 3.** Rock Chidley, English Concertina, London, c1860. *Photo: Neil Wayne*

The collection is now being offered for sale to a new permanent home for researchers and enthusiasts. Museums and other institutions around the world are being approached. More information is available through the following contacts:

**Bill Crossland**  
bill.crossland1[at]btinternet.com  
**Neil Wayne**  
neil.wayne[at]free-reed.co.uk

## The Documentary Evidence of Bristol's Portable Street Barrel Piano Makers, Part 2

*This is the second of two articles examining the documentary evidence of Bristol's makers of the portable street barrel piano in the nineteenth century. In GSN 62, Part 1 concentrated on the Hicks family whose name is commonly associated with such instruments and their immediate associates; here, we attempt to account for any remaining craftsmen. As with the earlier article, our notes have been derived from multiple documented sources: census returns, the registers for births, baptisms, marriages and deaths, street directories, etc.*

To date, John Baylis has been recorded as a London-based maker of Hicks-style barrel pianos.<sup>1</sup> His place of birth (c1815), however, is only a few miles to the north-east of Bristol, in Mayshill, Gloucestershire. Baylis was another carpenter by trade and that is how he was described from 1836, and again when at Pennywell Road in the 1841 census.<sup>2</sup> From 1851 he was described as an organ builder in Twinnel Street, Easton near Pennywell Road; in 1860 he is a 'barrel organ manufacturer' and in 1865 a 'barrel organ & cylinder piano pianoforte manufacturer' but now in Clerkenwell, London.<sup>3</sup> It seems probable that the rumours of a connection with the Bristol Hicks family are true because around 1840 he was living in the same street, Pennywell Road, as George Hicks, and from 1858 to 1865 he lived at 60 Great Saffron Hill, Hatton Garden, and the same address that Sophia Hicks, widow of Joseph Hicks (jnr.), had occupied a few years earlier.<sup>4</sup> Later, via 39 Hatton Wall, Baylis moved to 31 Clerkenwell Green, an address John Hicks (jnr.) had also

occupied in 1870–71. Baylis died in November 1887 when living in St Johns Lane, a road leading off St John Street where Stephen Lewis (apprenticed to Joseph Hicks in Bristol) was living with Daniel Imhof in 1851. No instruments are known to survive by John Baylis, but a label of his, with an illustration of a Hicks style barrel piano, is published in Ord-Hume's *Clockwork Music*, in which he is described as 'Baylis & Son.'<sup>5</sup> Baylis certainly had a son, John Jeffrey, born 1836 and married in Clifton, Bristol in 1852. On his death certificate, Baylis (senior) is described as an 'Organ Builder Master', suggesting that he employed junior organ builders — his son perhaps. No reliable information on the son has been found after he married.

The last parts of the jigsaw that outlines Bristol's street barrel piano makers involve the Taylor family, or families of Bristol. Our research suggests a complex, and in all probability incomplete, story; see Figure 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur W.J.G. Ord-Hume, *Automatic Pianos: A Collector's Guide to the Pianola, Barrel Piano, & Aeolian Orchestrelle* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2004), p.403.

<sup>2</sup> *Church of England Baptisms*, St John the Baptist, Frenchay, 17 July 1836; and *Mathews's Directory*.

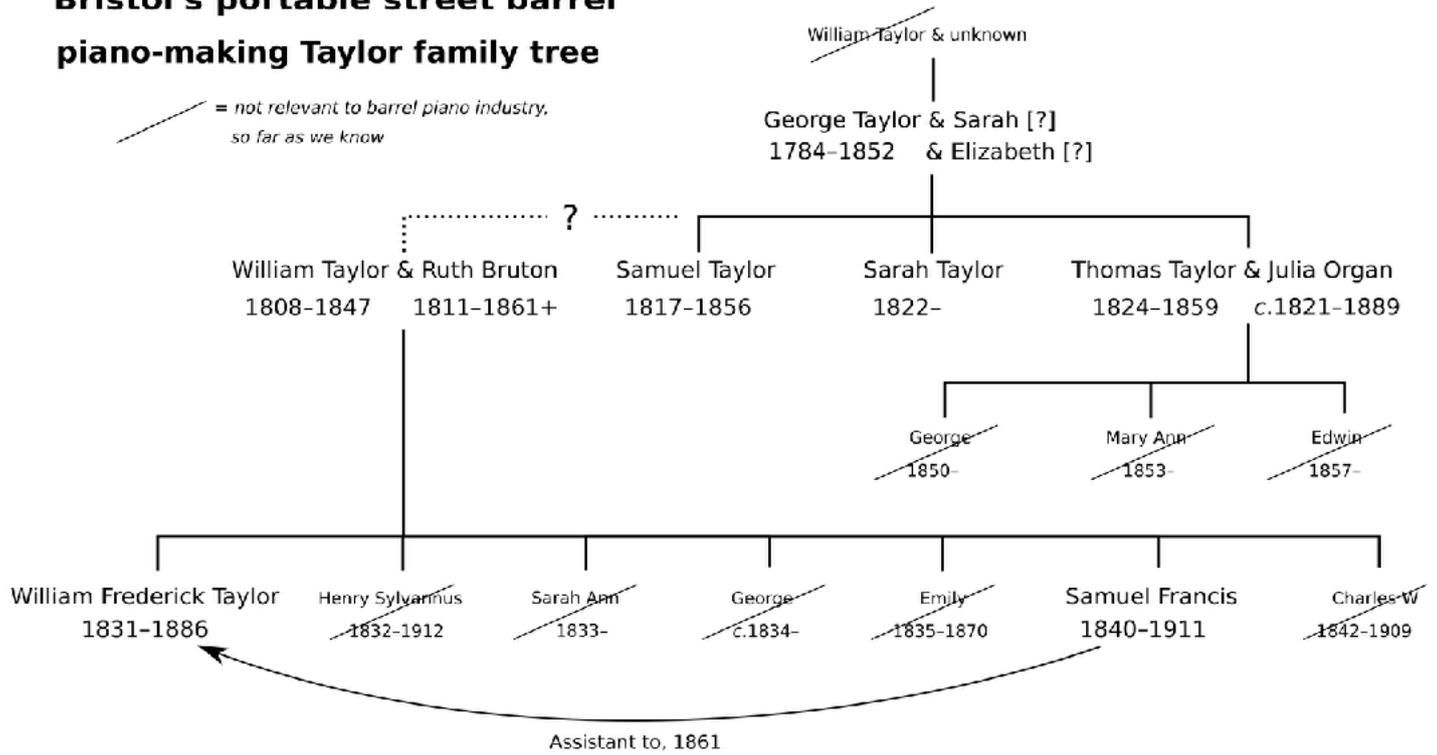
<sup>3</sup> *Mathews's*; and *Post office London Directory 1860 and 1865*.

<sup>4</sup> *Church of England Baptisms*, St Peter's, Saffron Hill, 1 August 1852.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur W.J.G. Ord-Hume, *Clockwork Music: An Illustrated History of Mechanical Musical Instruments from the Musical Box to the Pianola, from Automaton Lady Virginal Players to Orchestrion* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1973), p.292.

## Bristol's portable street barrel piano-making Taylor family tree

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ = not relevant to barrel piano industry, so far as we know



**Figure 1.** Taylor family tree.

Reliable records of the various Taylors begin in the early nineteenth century with brothers Samuel (1817–1856) and Thomas (1824–1859), born in Bristol to musician (elsewhere, accountant) George Taylor (c1784–1852) and Sarah, maiden name unknown.<sup>6</sup> Because information on the second son, Thomas, is short, he is dealt with first. In the 1841 census Thomas is described as an organ builder of Upper Maudlin Lane, Bristol, a road that connected with Lower Maudlin Lane where Joseph Hicks senior lived at the time (from 1841 to 1844). Thomas's age, 19, is noteworthy because it suggests he did not complete a traditional apprenticeship, which would normally have

spanned the years 14 to 21. No apprentice's records exit under his name and the implication therefore is that he learnt organ-building from within the family, but from precisely who is not known. In 1849, and then living in Sheffield, he married the appropriately named Julia Organ (c1829–1889, father an accountant) from Bristol.<sup>7</sup> The 1851 census shows Thomas as a cabinet maker, with Julia and one child at 8 Cross Chapel Street, Sheffield, just across the river to West Bar and the city's growing Italian community. Six years later and at the same address, Thomas was listed as a 'musical instr mkr'.<sup>8</sup> A portable street barrel piano survives which Langwill and Boston, and Ord-Hume

<sup>6</sup> *Church of England Baptisms*, St John the Baptist, Bristol, 20 April 1817; and St James, Bristol, 30 January 1831.

<sup>7</sup> *Church of England Parish Register*, St James, 3 January 1849; and *Kelly's Directory*, multiple editions.

<sup>8</sup> *White's History, Gazetteer and Directory of Derbyshire and Sheffield* (1857), p.989.

refer to, marked 'No. 79' and as being by Thomas Taylor of Sheffield; Bonhams, selling the instrument in 2010, show the maker as 'Taylor & Company' of Sheffield.<sup>9</sup> Thomas Taylor and family moved again, to Birmingham, where, as a 'musical instrument maker' of 32 Bartholemew Street, he died in 1859.<sup>10</sup> The address is within the city's Italian enclave and parallel to New Canal Street where John Hicks (jnr.) is recorded as living in 1871. Julia Taylor and the children remained in Birmingham but no-one within the family is seen to follow their father in making musical instruments. The training of Thomas's older brother, Samuel Taylor (1817–1856), is equally obscure, but the suspicion is that like others in this study it came via cabinet making. In support of this thesis is the 1851 census which shows Samuel and his father, George, as visitors at the house of 'cabinet maker' Joseph Grant (c1788–1854) at 26 Host Street, in the city centre. The attribution of 'visitor' given to the Taylors is not easily explained because a year later, George died in Host Street, as did Samuel four years later.<sup>11</sup>

George Taylor's profession in 1851 reads 'accountant' (elsewhere he is a musician), but Samuel's profession is clear: 'Manufacturer of Barrel Organs & Cylinder Pianofortes.' This agrees with Langwill and Boston's record of an extant barrel piano with the label: 'Samuel Taylor, Musical Instrument Maker, No 26 Host Street, next to Colston's School, St Augustine's Place, Bristol. Manufacturer of Barrel Organs and Cylinder Pianofortes. NB Country orders attended to punctually.'<sup>12</sup> Samuel is later recorded at 27 Host Street (probably no.26 renumbered) as a 'barrel organ & pianoforte

maker' in the 1856 *Post Office Directory of Gloucestershire, Bath & Bristol*, and on his death certificate — died 21 August 1856 — as a 'Musical Instrument Maker (Master)'. The certificate's informant is one George Sheppard (b.1834) who also appeared on the 1851 census return at Grant's house. At that point Sheppard was listed as an 'apprentice', although to whom we do not know. However, the fact that Samuel Taylor's death certificate shows him as a 'Master' implies that he was employing junior craftsmen in musical instrument making, and it seems reasonable to suggest that Sheppard could have been the employee. Sheppard's apprenticeship in 1851 might therefore also have been with Samuel Taylor; equally, it may have been with Joseph Grant. The former would though accord with local knowledge, which suggests a link between Sheppard and the Taylors.<sup>13</sup> No other details have been seen to confirm or deny the suggestion, and later census returns show that Sheppard pursued a career as a cabinet maker-cum-carpenter. As to Grant, the fact that Samuel Taylor used Grant's address as his business address may imply that the older cabinet maker was a significant part or influence on Samuel Taylor's making of street barrel pianos.

Between the brothers Samuel and Thomas Taylor was a sister, Sarah, born in 1822. Sarah's relevance is that in the 1841 census she appears as a 'Prof of Music' at the house of one William Taylor (1808–1847). The 1841 census is of limited help in identifying William. Firstly, his place of birth is unclear but suggests it was not in Bristol, but in Scotland, Ireland or overseas. And secondly, because the 1841 census did not

<sup>9</sup> Lyndesay G. Langwill and Canon Noel Boston, *Church and Chamber Barrel-Organs: Their Origin, Makers, Music and Location. A Chapter in English Church Music* (Edinburgh: Lyndesay G. Langwill, 1970), p.63; and Ord-Hume (2004), p.437; and Bonhams [bonhams.com/auctions/18148/lot/107/](https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/18148/lot/107/), accessed 4 November 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Death Certificate 340, St Peter, Birmingham, Thomas Taylor, 24 December 1859.

<sup>11</sup> Burial records, St Augustine the Less, Bristol, 7 July 1852; Death Certificate 465, St Augustine, Bristol, Samuel Taylor, 23 August 1856.

<sup>12</sup> Langwill and Boston (1970), p.63.

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication, Richard Dean of Dean Organs.

record the relationship between occupants, these limitations in our data means that it has not been possible to determine whether William is an older brother to Samuel and Thomas Taylor, or from another family. That there is a familial connection seems highly likely given Sarah's presence in his house in 1841, as does the baptism record of William's son, William Frederick Taylor on 30 January 1831, which is followed on the same page by the baptisms of Sarah and her brother, Thomas. William Taylor's comparatively early death also fits the pathology of brothers Samuel and Thomas Taylor, all dying around the age of 40. To add to the puzzle, the 1831 baptism record also suggests a potential connection between a Bristol Taylor family and Stephen Lewis, Joseph Hicks (jnr.)'s apprentice. The church record shows the baptisms of George Henry and Caroline Louise Taylor, children of George (a musician) and Caroline Matilda Taylor, of St Michaels. Caroline's maiden name is Lewis, and she is the brother of the apprentice Stephen. Her husband, however, is consistently recorded as being from Exeter, not Bristol, and it may be pure coincidence that two families named Taylor, most of them musicians, just happened to be at the same church baptism on the same day.

What is clear is that William Taylor (1808–1847) and his family are intricately connected to the portable street barrel piano making trade in Bristol. Langwill and Boston record what is assumed to be this Taylor as a musical instrument maker at 69 Stoke's Croft, a street close to St James's parish, from 1835 to 1839,<sup>14</sup> as do *Mathews's* directories from 1837 to 1839. The 1841 census records him as Wm Taylor, 'Mus Inst Maker' married to Ruth (nee Bruton), with sons Frederick (*aka* William Frederick), Henry (*aka* Harry), George, and Francis (*aka* Samuel Francis) living at Quay (more usually

Broad Quay), and only a short distance from Joseph Grant in Host Street. As the Taylor address suggests, this was a dockside location and *Mathews's* records the family at 57 Broad Quay from 1840 to 1848 when Wm Taylor's business is shown as 'musical instrument maker, nautical stationers.' The description, 'nautical stationer', is taken to mean the seller of nautical charts and maps, although this may have been Ruth Taylor's business, for in the 1851 census she is listed as a 'chart seller.'

The later address and period relate to a surviving barrel piano which is labelled: 'William Taylor, 57, Broad Quay, Bristol. Manufacturer of Cylinder or Handle Piano-Fortes and Organs. Extra Cylinders set to Piano-Fortes, Organs and Musical Clocks — Old Ones re-set. Harps and Piano-Fortes Tuned and Repaired.'<sup>15</sup> The label confirms the period by which the Taylors had become established makers of portable street barrel pianos, and closely matches the dates at which the Hicks family had established their business making the same instrument. But the Taylor label also indicates that William's business was not just about manufacturing musical instruments, and that skilled musical services like tuning and re-pinning barrel were also available. That said, there is a feeling that the breadth of William Taylor's business services might point to one in which work was sub-contracted out to others — piano work to Joseph Grant for instance — rather than it all being carried out by William Taylor and his family.

William Taylor died in 1847. At that point, the business became 'Taylor, Mrs & Son, musical instrument makers, and nautical stationers'. The son in question was William Frederick Taylor (1831–1886). From 1849 to 1854, the business was at 57 then 45 Broad Quay. In the 1851 census, William F. Taylor is recorded as a 'Musical instrument maker & musical professor.'

<sup>14</sup> Langwill and Boston (1970), p.63.

<sup>15</sup> Ord-Hume (2004), p.437.

Again, and noting the age at which William Frederick describes himself as a musical instrument maker, we assume that he learnt the trade from within the family. His broader musical expertise can be seen in his advertising of 'NEW MUSIC.— Just published, for the Piano, "THE WHIRLWIND," Grand Galop Brillant By W F TAYLOR, Composer of the celebrated "La Polka Brillant."' <sup>16</sup> Copies of these works do not appear to have survived although some of his other compositions have. <sup>17</sup> He then went on an advertising spree in late 1854 and early 1855 trumpeting his 'PIANO-FORTE MANUFACTORY', his stock of the 'great variety of Accordions, Flutinas, Concertinas, Violins, Musical-boxes, &c, constantly on Sale', and 'W F TAYLOR, PIANO-FORTE, ORGAN, AND BARREL PIANO-FORTE MANUFACTURER.' <sup>18</sup> This entry, from April 1855, is the last explicit mention of barrel piano making by W.F. Taylor. We should also note that the previous three 1854–55 advertisements included the offer of an apprenticeship of some sort, although none have been found in Bristol's archives.

The subsequent withdrawal of an offer of an apprenticeship heralded some sort of change in W.F. Taylor's business, with the newspapers announcing in June 1855 the auction of 'The whole of the Manufactured and Unmanufactured STOCK of Mr W F Taylor, Musical Instrument-Maker and Nautical Stationer'. <sup>19</sup> That the musical instrument making business should close seems confirmed with '[a] lathe, benches, hand screws, glass cases, counters, desks, piping, a quantity of plank, veneer and scantling, ironmongery, steel wire, &c.' included in the auctioneer's listing.

<sup>16</sup> *Bristol Mercury*, 4 November 1854.

<sup>17</sup> See The Bodleian Library, Oxford and University of Cambridge library holdings, for instance.

<sup>18</sup> *Bristol Mercury*, 30 December 1854; 20 January 1855; 3 February 1855; and 14 April 1855.

<sup>19</sup> *Bristol Mercury*, 23 June 1855.

<sup>20</sup> *Post Office Directory of Gloucestershire, Bath & Bristol* (1856).

<sup>21</sup> *Mathews's*.

One question springs immediately to mind: did the fact that Joseph Grant had died the previous year have any influence on William Frederick's decision? But like Joseph Hicks (snr.) before him, entries in *Mathews's* indicate that Taylor carried on as before describing himself variously as: 'pianoforte & organ builder & chart seller' at 44 Broad Quay (1856); 'piano-forte, and general music, barrel organ, and piano-forte maker – warehouse, 43 Broad Quay' (1856 to 1859); 'teacher of the piano-forte and organ', 43 Broad Quay (1856 to 1858); 'musical instrument maker', 44 Broad Quay (1859); 'musical instrument maker', Park Street (1860); and 'general music, barrel organ, and piano-forte maker – warehouse, 43 Broad Quay, and 1 College Green' (1861). <sup>20</sup> Again, a speculative question: was George Sheppard, the apprentice at Grant's house in 1851, co-opted into William Frederick's business to replace Grant?

W.F. Taylor's later addresses in Park Street and College Green were only a short distance from Broad Quay but were across the docks and represented a move up market. The 1861 census shows Mrs Ruth Taylor at the College Green address as a lodging housekeeper (to a family of three); William F. Taylor, and his sister Emily, both listed as music teachers; and Samuel F[rederick] Taylor (1840–1911), shown as 'assistant to brother'. Samuel Frederick Taylor is later to be found as a cabinet maker in 1870 and 1872, then as 'Piano tuner' or 'Piano tuner & Repairer' from 1875 to 1911 at a series of addresses around Bristol. <sup>21</sup> As to William Frederick Taylor, in 1862–63 he is shown in *Mathews's* as a 'professor of the pianoforte and organ' at the College Street address. In 1863 he moved up the hill to Clifton, to 4 Frederick place.

Following the deaths of his wife in 1865 and mother in 1867, he moved to Battersea, London where the 1871 census records him as a ‘Composer of Music’ and a ‘Musician & Composer’ in 1881; he died in 1886.

The minutiae in the later Taylor family tree is, to an extent, academic: street barrel piano making in Bristol had ceased by 1860. Why did William F. Taylor change from maker of street barrel pianos to music teacher, composer, or piano tuner? Presumably, the street instrument business was no longer viable. By 1860, it is said that the then current generation of Italian street musicians had learned how to service their own instruments, or they could take them to the settled Italian street barrel piano makers. Tracing them, however, is exceedingly difficult as Latanza admits,<sup>22</sup> and no Bristol-based Italian portable street barrel piano makers have

been identified in this study. Should they have existed, they would most likely be hidden in the ranks of Italian ‘musicians’ clustered around Montague Street and Silver Street in St James. In the latter, in the 1891 census, members of the Tomasso and D’ambro families from Italy are all similarly listed. The two families were later joined by marriage, and it is believed that wheeled street barrel pianos could be hired from the D’ambro family in Bristol into the 1950s and that the instruments came from the Tomassos, from either their London or Leeds businesses.<sup>23</sup> The twentieth-century legacy of Bristol’s street barrel piano makers remains the subject of ongoing research.

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With additional research by Tim Israel

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<sup>22</sup> Latanza, Antonio, *Il piano a cilindro* (Rome: Arcane, 2009), p.114.

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Nourse, ‘Street Music and Street Musicians in Nineteenth-century Bristol’, *Sounds of the City: Five Hundred Years of Music Making in Bristol* (Redcliffe Press and UWE Regional History Centre), forthcoming, October 2022.