

SOUNDING BOARD

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Guest Editor PAMELA NASH

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We rely on your input for future issues. Please send your contributions, comments and ideas to editor@harpsichord.org.uk .

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To kick off this edition of the newsletter, I offer a short comment on the harpsichord as a contemporary instrument, and specifically in a duo context. For the last ten years or so, this medium has been a particular interest of mine and has featured in two festivals in Manchester, called simply Harpsichordfest, for which I was curator. My most recent venture as a duo harpsichordist was earlier this year as part of the 'Multiplier' series.

Multiplier: contemporary works for two harpsichords

The Multiplier series took place at the new concert venue, Kings Place in London, master-minded by one of our brightest young composers, Graham Fitkin. It focused on multiple timbres of the same instrument, and Jane Chapman and I performed on duo harpsichords in the concert on March 14th which also featured duo harps. Our programme featured a work written for us by Graham Fitkin, alongside radically contrasting works by Steve Montagu and Arthur Rathbone-Pullen. All three pieces explore the sonic potential of duo harpsichords whilst occupying their own unique sound world.

Whenever Jane and I play contemporary duo repertoire, we encounter strong reactions from both harpsichord aficionados and new music followers alike, often hearing the instrument in this context for the first time. This is good news! At the risk of attracting the odd voice of dissent, we don't want the harpsichord to be polarised from the contemporary aesthetic! Whilst more players are including music by living composers in their programmes, the harpsichord naturally carries with it a set of associations and expectations, especially with the public mainstream, and there is a need to subvert the stereotype - that the harpsichord is seen chiefly as an iconic symbol of high Baroque art. The most life-affirming moments in this odyssey of discovery are when adventurous composers leap in excitedly and latch on to the potential of the harpsichord and all the things it can do. There is now a core repertoire of highly diverse works by composers who have found the instrument inspiring in its double capacity and have produced cutting-edge works of great imagination and distinction. When you have something like a piece for two harpsichords with amplification and digital playback, using all the percussive and bass guitar-like qualities of the amplified harpsichords, it can have a quite devastating impact. It is a complete surprise to both composer and audience that an instrument with such a light sound mass can be exploited for its sonic power, once described as having 'the sonic potential of a sub-machine gun'.

The logistical implications of getting two harpsichords together (plus gear!) will be evident to all who read this. It is fraught enough to transport one instrument around, and with two there is the extra consideration of how to create a rehearsal scenario. But duo harpsichords, whilst riveting in musical impact, are in effect an extension of what is already an established contemporary medium: the solo harpsichordist has long been transporting even the most reluctant listener to unimagined sound worlds.

New music notwithstanding, what the listener constantly finds revelatory is the effect of amplification. Obviously, different pieces call for different 'grades' of amplification, from subtle to substantial, but when you amplify the harpsichord, you are actually able to project the natural intimacy and essence of its sound to create a more sensual and theatrical atmosphere. The pluck has more presence and immediacy; at times harp or lute-like, and at other times like guitars *en masse*. In general terms, I have often found that the true nature of harpsichord sound can be subsumed within some contemporary instrumental ensembles or in the acoustic of certain spaces - unless of course in a salon

environment such as at Handel House. So at the risk of being contentious in conclusion, I would like to see wider use of light amplification in larger concert venues.

Pamela Nash

If readers have any reaction to the above, they may wish to send in their response for publication in the next edition! editor@harpsichord.org.uk PN

And now to our current contributions, beginning with **Michael Ackerman's** fascinating foray into the life of a man who played a part in the resurrection of British 20th century harpsichord building.

ALEC HODSDON 1900 – 1986

I wrote about discovering my Hodsdon virginals with the help of David Wright in the May 2007 edition, with further notes in the January 2008 edition, describing its return from Bexley, and the somewhat barren search Maria Boxall and I had for biographical details of AH. What follows is the result of subsequent research.

I have written at least three theses or dissertations over the years, but I have never before engaged in such interesting primary research. The experience has been fascinating, and illuminating. It has given me an insight into the nature of history. I have always been interested in personalities, how people live their lives, especially those people who have created the sort of things that I enjoy. So, what could be simpler than finding out a few facts about a leading harpsichord builder, not long dead, who produced the bulk of his work in living memory, within my own life time? Well, it wasn't at all easy or straightforward, but fate was really (and uncharacteristically) kind to me.

First of all, Pamela Nash very kindly responded to my plea in the Newsletter for information about AH, and put me in touch with Anne Gehammar, AH's daughter. Then Jane Clark told me that she had been taught by Margaret Fletcher, AH's wife, and had been a regular visitor to their house. On the very evening of my return from Saffron Waldon, having visited Anne G, I bumped into Oliver Santig, who told me that David Evans had studied harpsichord building with AH. What a piece of luck! So off to Henley on Thames I went to talk to him. In fact it turns out that David Evans didn't learn harpsichord building from AH, but from Frank Sykes, of whom you will read below.

I also had discussed Hodsdon instruments with Edmund Handy, and I telephoned Alan Gotto, as he got the two manual going that was in AH's possession but unfinished when he died. I wrote to AH's grandson, who provided the agreeable note about sherry drinking. Lastly, another piece of luck, Edna Lewis found the reference to the magazine article, of which I only had a photocopied text.

Everyone has been most helpful, and I'm very grateful. What has struck me most forcibly is that different people remember the same event or the same person quite differently, indeed their recollections are often contradictory!

So, on with the story!

AH was sixteen, staying at the Grand Hotel, Brighton. He held the door open for a girl of fourteen. Her name was Margaret Fletcher. They married and lived happily ever after!

Margaret studied violin at the Guildhall and she studied harpsichord with one of the Dolmetschs. AH presumably (there's a lot of presumption in this account) went to university and read chemistry, as he is reported to have been an 'analytical chemist'. Nobody seems to remember which university he attended, or where he exercised his profession.

Margaret was niece to no less person than the Colonel Benton-Fletcher of Fenton House fame. So bear in mind three ingredients: early keyboard instruments, musical society, money.

Chemist AH and musician MH settled in Lavenham, selecting a choice half-timbered house in the town centre and removing it to the suburb. I leave you to ponder the implications of that last statement.

Probably because of Margaret's connections their house was a frequent meeting place for a galaxy of people who I knew only as names in my youth: P Pears & B Britten, Thurston Dart, Basil Lam, Gustav Leonhart, Cecil Clutton. AH and C Clutton wrote an article together for the Musical Times (May 1947) 'Defining the Virginal'. My virginal conforms closely to their definition, but it is amusing to note that in that article they do not refer to one single extant instrument, ancient or modern.

AH's passion was steam cars, and model railways. (Do look up the Steam Cars Club!) Margaret was possibly a forceful woman, and she may have had the all important pennies. AH stopped being a chemist, steam cars were allowed as a hobby, but from now on AH was to become a harpsichord builder. I imagine a dialogue something like:

'But, darling, I don't know anything about harpsichords.'

‘That doesn’t matter, all you need to do is copy some of uncle’s instruments.’

‘But I hate woodwork.’

‘Don’t be silly, we can easily get men to build the things.’

Thus was launched on his career the first Englishman called a ‘harpsichord builder’ in the 20th C.

By the way, there was another Margaret who encouraged her husband to build harpsichords, his name was Robert Goble.

Where did AH get his designs? He could have followed the late 19th C German tradition introduced into Britain by the Dolmetschs. Instead, apart from the mandatory 16’ which in fact he eventually abandoned, he seems to have looked at old British instruments, but reinterpreted them with modern conveniences, that is, pedals. I get the impression that the instruments were his design, and that he modified them in discussion with musicians and musicologists. It would appear that at least once he used metal frames, there is a big metal-framed 1952 instrument for sale somewhere in New Zealand as I write. I haven’t come across any other references to his using metal frames.

Who built the instruments? Ah! Who indeed! In the nearby metropolis of Sudbury was a humble woodworker, turning out Jacobethan furniture, by name: Fred Sykes (FS). FS had originally been an assistant harmonium builder up North, and the firm for which he worked had gone bust. He was the craftsman who entered AH’s employ, and there remained, building up a workshop of perhaps ten people, including a luthier from Paris. A workshop was built between the Hodsdon’s house and the Sykes’s cottage.

The AH catalogue of which I have a copy would be worthy as illustrations of E F Benson’s Riseholme ‘you had to be in a frantically Elizabethan frame of mind to be at ease there.’ Talking of Riseholme, Margaret used to give virginal recitals ‘in costume’, something of which I am sure Lucia would have approved. I also have an article ‘Harpsichords in Suffolk’ East Anglian Magazine March 1963 by one Michael Marais, in the saccharine style of county magazines, where AH is reported to have said that he ‘intends never to retire’

Well, be that as it may, retire he did, or perhaps the word ‘withdraw’ is nearer the mark, during the sixties. For the remainder of his active life he devoted himself to steam cars. The workshop still had it use though. Many is the time he excused himself from company, as there were important matters he had to attend to in the workshop! A little

bird told me 'he didn't enter the workshop that often.' One is reminded of those important letters that have to be written after lunch, privately, in one's own room.

Meanwhile, FS carried on for some time, turning out AH instruments. Eventually he went over to building instruments under his own name. By all accounts he was a man of integrity, quiet, unassuming, and brave.

AH took sherry before dinner, Sainsbury's during the week, Bristol Cream on Sundays. He had a certain penchant for attractive young ladies, which may serve to illuminate a rather puzzling reference on page 109 of 'Music Research: New Directions for a New Century' 'Mancell Kirby, Melbourne's first harpsichordist' 'arranged to have a virginal built by Alec Hodsdon, which she used in performances from 1955 onwards. Hodsdon required her to take lessons from him, which she resented.' That is the only reference I have discovered to AH the harpsichord teacher!

Zuckerman in 'the Modern Harpsichord' p130 states that AH made his own keyboards. I'm not sure that that is so, as I have been told he bought in keyboards from a variety of sources. Zuckerman also refers to the instability of the harpsichord case work. That is undoubtedly true. Bends, buckles, cracks, and bang! AH didn't know too much about the insides of harpsichords, careful analysis of historic construction was in its infancy. He did from time to time 'restore' historic instruments, but fortunately did not interfere extensively with them, which has made subsequent restorations easier than they might have been. When his clavichord cases insisted on buckling, his answer was to incorporate a sheet of steel into the base. You can easily tell if an instrument has been so modified by its weight. Another drawback to AH instruments are the jacks. It's difficult to imagine how the original jacks in my virginal could ever have functioned effectively, the workmanship is curiously slap-dash.

Having drawn the readers' attention to flaws and disadvantages in the instruments, I must balance that by saying that it remains that AH was a pioneer, and his instruments can sound very attractive. His virginal design is particularly successful.

Kottick ('A history of the harpsichord' p422) refers to AH as 'shadowy'. I'm glad that as a result of my enquiries, as far as I am concerned he is a good deal less shadowy. I have discovered a far from straightforward history, with many genuine features of period charm, and when I play my virginal I no longer have to wonder who was Alec Hodsdon.

Michael Ackerman 29th November 2008

‘New’ Baroque Harpsichord Music

Grant Colburn

Grant Colburn has now completed his newest book of period harpsichord music which will be titled, "Setts of Suits of Lessons for the Harpsicord or Spinnet." Unlike his previous books which were primarily inspired by English keyboard composers of the 1750's, this book is inspired by the previous generation writing around the 1720's, being somewhere between the musical styles of William Croft and Thomas Roseingrave.

Grant writes:

The contents are as follows:

Lesson I in Dm: 1. Almand 2. Corant 3. Ground 4. Jigg
Lesson II in F: 1. Almand 2. Corant. 3. Saraband 4. Gigge
Lesson III in Bm 1. Almand 2. Corant 3. Theater Tune 4. Minuett 5. Jigg
Lesson IV in C 1. Almand 2. Ground 3. Minuet 4. Antick Jigg
Lesson V in Dm 1. Prelude 2. Aire 3. Minuett 4. Jigg
Lesson VI in G 1. Prelude 2. Almand 3. Corant 4. Saraband 5. The Earl of Arden's March

Here is the pdf file for the Almand in G which you can print.

<http://www.angelfire.com/music7/renaissance/GAlmand.pdf>

Also for those that may have missed it before, here is a (relatively decent) performance of the Bm Almand played by Ernst Stolz.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSHwA6AJFnM>

If interested in purchasing a copy, or for further questions please contact me at:

grantco13@new.rr.com

Thanks for reading!

Grant Colburn

Reply to Glenn Modrak from David Hackett

David Hackett, a member from Northampton, read Glenn Modrak's contribution in the January 2008 newsletter with interest and feeling, having been through similar 'hoops' himself. This is his response:

Hello, Glenn,

I read your piece in the January newsletter of the British Harpsichord Society with interest; I still have a photocopy of the chapter from that book! Forgive me for my delay in replying – I have only recently discovered and joined the Society.

I hope that you may have had some response by now, but if not, perhaps my thoughts may be of some use.

First of all, I support entirely the proposition that making a harpsichord from scratch is a lot of fun – and the best possible way to learn about these things! It is, of course, a bonus if the instrument actually works and sounds half-way decent. But we love them, whatever.

My own plans started well before yours – in the 1960's – and I have just laid the keel of the Big Harpsichord that I promised myself all those years ago. In the meantime, there have been many other projects as circumstances allowed, including an English Spinnet that does actually work! So I have encountered many of the challenges and problems that you mention.

I think it is important to say that it is *your* harpsichord – to make your own choices. Best if we know what is 'authentic', but my own (two-manual) instrument will combine ivory keys (antique) with a coupler – not a combination often found in history.

I've had a look at The Instrument Workshop's website – interesting! I think that it is still under construction.

Your 1992 pine should be seasoned by now! Is it in the same room where the harpsichord will live?

More or less any straight-grained hard wood should be OK for the wrestplank; my favourite is maple on top of oak – each piece a bit less than 1" thick. Two thinner pieces are less likely to have splits than one thick piece. Absolute strength is only really a problem if you have a cut-through lute stop, which effectively makes the plank much narrower.

Lime (*Tilia spp.*) is indeed an excellent wood for keys – the American version (*Tilia americana*) is called Basswood. This would also be fine for other case parts. Does this help? Otherwise, we remember that the old makers used what they had, therefore Ruckers used poplar for the keys, as well as for nearly everything else. American whitewood (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) also known as tulipwood or yellow poplar is a pretty good stand-in. German keys were often made of pine, but in this case it's important to get the grain flat, i.e. with the growth-rings visible on the side of the keys – otherwise it's virtually impossible to drill the holes accurately. And no knots, of course.

Soundboard timber is indeed a problem! However, remember again that there is considerable argument amongst experts about what original soundboards actually are made from, with spruce, fir, and pine all in the frame; and of course cypress in Italy and elsewhere. And this is before we even start arguing about names, languages, and translations! Any knot-free straight-grained fine softwood should be worth a try, and my own private bet would be western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) unless you insist on a blonde soundboard. Or your aircraft-grade spruce could well be a good choice. All of these should be quarter-sawn; big bandsaws are expensive and take up a lot of space – is there a furniture workshop near you?

As I said, it's your harpsichord – but my own personal hates are felt and modern tuning pins. Please use nice woollen cloth, and consider making your own tuning pins – it's easy!

All the very best; I hope some of this helps a bit. By all means e-mail if you wish,
David

David Hackett

friendsofsquarepianos@btinternet.com

David also says he'll be delighted to keep a 'diary' of the growth of his Big Harpsichord, although he says it may take some time due to too many other current projects.

In the meantime, he has sent a picture of his Little Harpsichord, based on the RCM (Stephen Keene?) of 1708.

David writes:

I could not resist expanding the short/broken octave, and adding a few extra notes in the treble. However, the soundboard, barring, etc. are reasonably authentic. I know that we are always loyal to our own, and it is fun to pick out a tune on one's own creation, but it works reasonably well and doesn't sound too bad!



David Hackett, after an instrument in the Royal College of Music collection

Irvin Phillips, a member from Australia, has sent this commentary on the making of one of his harpsichords. Other makers should find it fascinating. Below is a photo of his latest instrument.

Task- Description

Comment

Jack guides

Accuracy was the key. When made of wood only it was necessary to construct accurate jigs and to use a pattern jack blank to ensure that each guide opening was the same. Considerable time, trial and design changes were undertaken to gain a good result.

A leather overlay required a square punch. As this was not felt practical, guides were made entirely of hard wood.

Keys

Again accuracy was paramount. Use made of plastic key tops to measure width and also to ensure cut for each sharp was accurate. Length of heads shortened slightly. Fronts cut as single strip prior to cutting out. Band saw used to cut from single shape of total key board made from pine wood strips glued together. All holes for guide pins drilled into key frame prior to cutting out individual keys. Square slots for front and centre pins of keys cut using square punch made to size. Key tops were of jarrah with sharps topped in ivory. Naturals were coated with tung oil. Keyboard transposes down one semitone.

Having experience in making and re-covering keys was an advantage. Result good. Will continue to use this design.

Jacks

Several local woods tried. Jarrah was most suitable due to weight and ease of working. A special jig was developed that allowed each jack to be drilled accurately and also to fit jack tongues to jacks precisely. Rock maple tongues found most suitable. Springs made from fine piano wire (0.4 mm). Two dampers per jack were used for greatest damping efficiency. No adjusting screws used but all adjustments were made during regulation, (as with early instruments). This proved most satisfactory and trouble free. Delrin used for plectrum.

No further changes to be made to design of jacks.

Basic Case

Spine and cheek made from solid local pine wood. Rebate cut for soundboard in spine. To avoid a twist when strung, thicker timber used. Satisfactory tone and volume apparent. Bent side made from plywood laminates (over frame). No tail joint with round tail. Interior bracing follows traditional designs. Jarrah used for strength and stability. Hitch pin rail made from rock maple laminate, supported by jarrah bracing. Attention to inward curve of bent side at treble end to ensure sufficient bracing. Bent side rails dovetailed into spine and cheek. Additional bracing included to stop any collapsing onto jack slot.

After much trial and error an appropriate design was developed. Understanding how strain of stringing collapsed the case was crucial. Use of strongest available glue essential.

Soundboard

The first problem was availability of appropriate timber. Western Red Cedar was selected as it had proved successful in guitar construction and was also used by several harpsichord makers in recent years. Pre-milled tongue and grooved boards were selected and hand planed down to thickness. These were then arranged at a 30 degree angle from spine, (as used by many modern harpsichord makers). This made the soundboard stronger and requiring lighter cross bracing belly bars. No decrease in tone or volume was apparent. No cracks appeared later in sound board. Bridge and nut were of rock maple laminate with carefully shaped crown to ensure strings did not foul. Pin placement for strings was made using a specially designed sliding square. Soundboard was carefully crowned for maximum tone using strategically placed and shaped belly bars in the manner of normal harpsichord construction. Wrest plank of rock maple had veneer overlay following same pattern as the soundboard.

Earlier attempts needed modification. Final design seems most satisfactory.

Stringing

Finest gauge piano wire was preferred and selected as it was commonly used by other harpsichord makers. To enhance good tuning a constant strain was aimed for of 6 kilos per string. Six ascending gauges were formulated for the entire compass. The curve of the spine was dictated by string length, tension and gauge of the total scale. A special procedure was developed to achieve the final result. A single hitch pin for each pair of strings was preferred as this obviated the need for single eyes for each string. (This method has been used successfully in pianos for more than 150 years). String layout 2x8. Plectrum plucking points followed traditional design.

Previous experience was most useful in determining this procedure accurately. Result is very uniform for tone and tuning.

Wrest plank

Several versions were tried. Initially a regular laminated piano wrest plank of rock maple was used. This proved very satisfactory but also very expensive. Wrest pins were also quite tight. Regular piano wrest pins were chosen as these gave more friction area for string coils. They also presented less problem for tuning as regular piano tools could be used. Chromed pins presented most attractively. The second attempt was made using solid rock maple with a right angled cross ply of jarrah strips under. This did not accept the wrest pins but produced the same lateral strength available with the laminated piano wrest planks. Wrest planks were dovetailed into the spine and cheek in the normal fashion. The thicker materials helped increase glue area and resulting overall strength.

The solid version of wrest planks will be used now as they are exactly the right degree of tightness for wrest pins and tuning. No reason seen to change wrest pin selection.

Stand

The stand was designed to be removed and to fold flat. It was also braced to decrease forward and backward movement. Legs were turned and general pattern followed traditional lines. Removal of stand does not require additional tools.

Several versions developed. Final design appears good.

Lid and Bottom

The lid and bottom of the instrument are of plywood. This was selected to avoid warping and to provide both strength and lightness. The key space has an attached front cover which folds back on lid when lid is raised. Lid stick is also attached to cheek. Music desk folds flat inside instrument when closed and is removable. This follows modern piano design and avoids damage to those parts.

Traditional designs were considered and improved.

Accessibility

Instruments were designed to ensure easy maintenance. All panels, action, keys and music desk, name board and other parts can easily be removed.

My previous experience in the piano industry helped in design.

Basic Design

The first instrument followed closely the design features of the early instruments, with thin cases and generally light and soft timber. The sound board was longitudinal. This approach provided a lot of insight into various design questions then corrected on the later models. New innovations were also tried, realising that early harpsichord makers worked with timber and other materials at their disposal – hence the differences between the various schools of harpsichord manufacture. The use of local Jarrah was felt a good substitute for European oak, but not in wrest planks, for example. Early makers were clearly in the business primarily to make money for basic survival. Additional innovative thought was a luxury, and therefore there were fewer instances of this. Changes were obviously made when things did not work, were too expensive or took too much time to effect. If the end result was less than successful the harpsichord would not sell and the maker's reputation would suffer. This fact is still obvious today when discussing innovational features with current commercial harpsichord builders, who tend to avoid experimenting and prefer to stay with the tried and tested approaches, simply because they need to sell their instruments to survive.

Harpsichord building is not a lucrative vocation and it never was. Innovation is restricted for reasons of economy.



The Harpsichord made by Irvin Phillips

Finally,
Judy Acton offers a glimpse of harpsichord heaven. Music, art, beauty and food -
the harpsichord is still the key that opens doors onto the finer things in life.

Harpsichordists at the Chateau Du Mont

Judy Acton

In what has become an annual pilgrimage with her harpsichord students (see Seixas in the Sunshine Jan 2008) Penelope Cave took a group of 13 of us to live in the seventeenth century Normandy Chateau 'Domaine Du Mont' for the last week in October 2008. Here we studied the French harpsichord repertoire, including that of the local composers Corrette, Dagincour and Duphly.

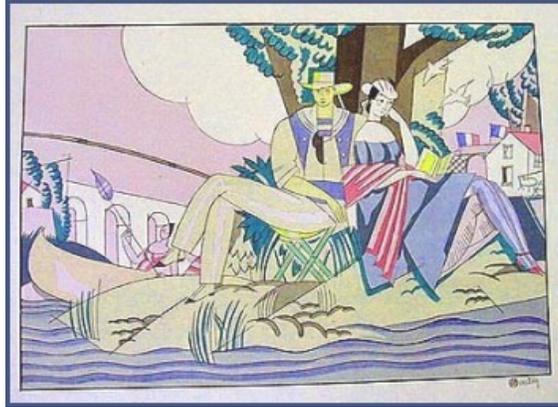
The Chateau itself was a delight, having been originally built in 1642 and much enlarged in 1720. It exuded history and was used during the French revolution to shelter aristocrats fleeing down the Seine from Paris, and again in the second world war to shelter allies escaping back to England.

This year Penny brought one of her own harpsichords with her. It is a copy by Michael Heale of the Giusti that is now in the Nuremberg museum and although not ideal for a French course, perhaps, was easy to transport and surprisingly full in sound.



We started by studying the eight preludes making up François Couperin's 'L'Art de toucher le clavecin'. Penny enlightened us by explaining and expanding much of Couperin's own advice and between us we were able to hear versions of each of the preludes. We then moved on to Froberger – movements from his suites showing the French influence on his style after the time he spent in Paris.

Dances from the suites of Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre from both livres (1687 and 1707) also provided a study session, as did those of the local composers based in Rouen. Finally we moved into the twentieth century with music by Erik Satie not specifically written for the harpsichord but which transferred to our instrument very well – particularly items from his series Sports and Divertissements (these pieces were much enlivened by the beautiful illustrations by Charles Martin in the Lucien Vogel edition – one of which appears below), the Ogives and the Gnessiennes. This prepared us well for our visit to the Maisons Satie described below.



Much was clarified on this course – in particularly the different varieties of *inégalité* playing, the great importance of playing ornaments slowly and on the beat not before it, the importance of spotting hemiolas, and much, much more. In such surroundings the music was superb, and with such sympathetic teaching, ably designed to suit all our levels of ability, Penny was the ideal teacher. We all learnt an immense amount, not just from our own performances (often marred by nerves quite apart from technique) but also from the performances of our colleagues on the course. It is great hearing technically excellent performances at concerts, but is also great to realise that most others have the same problems as oneself!

We had time for a day's visit to Honfleur where we were delighted with the 'Maisons Satie' through which we wandered listening to an excellent audioguide (in English) including many Satie quotes both musical and linguistic, whilst enjoying the exhibits. Another popular museum in Honfleur was the Eugene Boudin Museum. After viewing these delights and, of course, making time for a French lunch, we returned to the Chateau for more harpsichord instruction. Most of our afternoons were also free so we were able to sally out and enjoy the other local small towns in this part of Normandy - providing that we were back for more harpsichord study at 4.30!

One of our number most ably took on supervision of catering arrangements and provisions, and another nobly volunteered for the early morning trip to the boulangerie every day to provide our fresh croissants and baguettes. We also enjoyed several visits to the eating establishments around the chateau.

All in all this was an excellent week in every way. We look forward to more of Penny's monthly workshops at her home in Sussex, (Penelope@penelopezcave.co.uk) and to another weekend course early next year.

J.A.

To be included in the next issue of **'Sounding Board'**

'Harpichord Gift'

Following a request for help from an American librarian we had an enormous response from members throughout the world. The elusive historic royal gift to a Middle Eastern ruler was identified and links given to several contemporary accounts. Members also pointed out other early references to keyboard instruments being transported not only to the Middle East but also to China and Japan. A full account of all the information received will be published in the next edition of 'Sounding Board'. Thank you to all of you who kindly responded.

'Technical Questions'

Our next guest Editor is to be William Mitchell, builder of harpsichords and also of the Claviorganum illustrated on our Home page. For further details see www.harpsichord.org.uk/Oct06news/index.htm . This will be an opportunity for you to ask questions on technical matters and for you to seek advice on basic maintenance. Please send your queries to editor@harpsichord.co.uk