

Reviews of two books by Christopher Page:

The Guitar in Tudor England: A Social and Musical History Cambridge University Press, 2015 [xix, 248 p. ISBN 9781107108363];

The Guitar in Stuart England: A Social and Musical History Cambridge University Press 2017 [xix, 288 p. ISBN 9781108419789].

[Preamble: Cambridge University Press recently sent me review copies of these two books and a suitable review has now appeared in Early Music Performer (the journal of the National Early Music Association) Issue 43, October 2018. This focussed on the social and musical history of the early guitar as is, indeed, a stated aim of Christopher Page's latest works. Nevertheless a number of organological matters are touched upon and it is therefore appropriate to repeat much of the review for FoMRHI but in a revised and slightly expanded form to cover aspects associated with the physical development and construction of the instruments.]

In modern times many books about the guitar have often adopted something of a romantic approach when considering the period instrument – reflecting the author's personal foibles, they may contain uncorroborated speculations, excessive reliance on anecdotal and secondary sources and on artistic assertions. But a few have fairly recently adopted a more welcome forensic approach; such have included the late James Tyler's *The Early Guitar – A History and Handbook* (Oxford Early Music Series, 1980) and the expanded work by Tyler with Paul Sparks, *The Guitar and its Music* (Oxford Early Music Series, 2002) covering the development of the instrument and its music from the sixteenth century through to the early nineteenth. These also briefly dealt with the various national schools and the general types of instruments from the early four-course guitar through to the introduction of the new six-single-string instrument around 1800. However both of these, being relatively slim volumes, necessarily only touch on the particular manifestations of the instrument in various countries and there has long been a need for more detailed national histories of the instrument.

Two new books now very well cover this lacuna for the guitar's social and musical history in England– at least up to the early eighteenth century. Christopher Page's fine works, *The Guitar in Tudor England* and *The Guitar in Stuart England*, are scholarly, as might be expected from Professor Page, but are also highly absorbing and very readable. Indeed, from the high level of detailed research and insightful deductive reasoning, it would be difficult to see how many of these aspects could be better covered. The two books are fine examples of the more recent and welcome tendency to employ a scientific approach in the analysis of sources, including related literary works and pictorial depictions. Both are subtitled '*A Social and Musical History*' and this, rather than organological matters, is Page's principal focus with findings directly based on 'gathering the relevant literary, archival and pictorial documents in a more comprehensive manner than has yet been attempted'.

Whilst each book is self-contained they are, in truth, an omnibus recounting the guitar's history in England from around 1550 through to the first decades of the 1700s

as is, indeed, reflected by their titles. A further final book is promised in this CUP trilogy to cover the guitar in Georgian England – although I do hope Page might feel able to extend his work up to the end of Victoria's reign and so cover: important social and musical developments (including adoption by the middle classes – as recounted by Dickens); significant organological changes (Panormo's influences and the like); and influential, if often idiosyncratic, guitarists working in England later in the nineteenth century such as Giulio Regondi (also a celebrated Wheatsone concertina virtuoso), Madame Sidney Pratten (née Catharina Pelzer) and the popular music-hall comic, Ernest Shand, who had a second, more private, career as a guitar performer and composer.

Both books follow a similar pattern: an introduction setting the scene and outlining what is to come; various chapters on different aspects of the instrument; relevant appendices fleshing out the main text; a very extensive bibliography separated into primary and modern sources including some relevant dissertations and articles (although not all relevant specialist journals - such as *FoMRHI Quarterly* - are represented); and a useful index. Extensive notes are collected at the end of each chapter (but I still hanker for the more convenient format of having them as footnotes close by the main text).

The four-course guitar (English 'gittern', 'guiterne' and other cognates) was played in many parts of Europe during the sixteenth century, including Spain, Italy, the Low Countries, but especially in France where it enjoyed particular popularity. England was no exception to the fashion and in *The Guitar in Tudor England* Page identifies and recounts relevant manifestations of the guitar in this country. The seven chapters cover:

- images of the guitar in Tudor England, such as the Hengrave Hall overmantel depicting two guitars and the Eglantine Table at Hardwick Hall, which includes a guitar inlay. How typical these depictions showing such tiny instruments (string lengths around mid 30cm) were of all contemporary guitars is, of course, difficult to say and little is made of other representations to estimate general size, but Page puts a case for considering these particular historical artefacts as reasonable representations;

- studies of various inventory listings, accounts and other documents which identify some of those who owned guitars – from Henry VIII, through various gentlemen, university fellows and even apprentices – although how relatively widespread guitar ownership was compared to, say, the lute and/or cittern is not established;

- surviving sixteenth-century London Port Books which show the importing of instruments, including guitars, primarily by drapers and the like who may have simply filled free shipping space alongside their principal imports – small business entrepreneurs I suppose we might call them today;

- James Rowbothum's printed guitar tutor, *An Instruction to the Gitterne* from around 1569, of which only fragments survive. It seems to be an English adaptation of a partially extant work from Adrian Le Roy and this allows Page to reconstruct, fairly convincingly, much of Rowbothum's missing original tablature;

- examination of other contemporary sources of or relating to guitar music including the refined works published by Le Roy & Ballard (perhaps the finest guitar music of this period) and pieces from the Osborn Commonplace Book;

- possible song accompaniments with guitar which, although there are no extant sources for such songs from England at this time, Page believes was a known practice and, after considering various contemporary sources, he develops suitable accompaniments to some songs;

- the autobiography of a particularly interesting individual, Thomas Whythorne, who not only wrote songs and sonnets but also played the guitar. Whythorne appears to have successfully climbed the first few rungs on the social ladder towards becoming a gentleman through his artistic endeavours (studying composition, the lute, virginals, 'sittern' and the 'gittern') as well as possessing skill in the gentlemanly arts of fencing and dancing.

A conclusion summarises the preceding chapters and also outlines the eight substantial and relevant appendices. These cover: the terms 'gittern' and 'cittern'; references to gitterns from 1542 to 1605; the probate inventory of Dennys Bucke (1584); octave strings on the third and fourth courses; the fiddle tunings of Jerome of Moravia, 'swept' strings and the guitar; the mandore and the wire-strung gittern; the ethos of the guitar in sixteenth-century France; Raphe Bowle's manuscript of 1558.

The *Guitar in Tudor England* contains a few facsimiles of early guitar tablatures, but most musical examples are given in the octave transposing treble clef as if for a modern instrument in E (perhaps to appeal to modern guitar players), rather than a more expected nominal G or A for the period instrument (or even higher for the tiny instruments suggested above). A parallel intabulation would also have been useful for period guitarists who do not play from modern guitar staff notation.

The only significant reservation I have over much of what Page writes are the assertions about the stringing of the third and fourth courses (Appendix D). Firstly, the idea that on the early four-course guitar the high octave of an octave pair was always placed on the 'outside' (i.e. the plucking thumb side) of the course: whilst there is clear evidence that this was a practice widely employed on the later five-course guitar, there is no primary evidence, as far as I'm aware, for such use on the early four-course instrument – it may have been the case, or may not – but future anticipated retrospection is not really sufficient evidence for an earlier practice. Indeed, the similarities between much lute and guitar music of the period (for example in the Le Roy prints of both lute and guitar music) suggests a more lute-like disposition (with the lowest string of the bass pair on the right hand, thumb side) rather than one more suitable for the baroque *campanella* style of play and high chords, as often found with the later five-course instrument. Secondly, the evidence of one early printed instruction book, *Selectissima Elegantissimaque, Gallica, Italica Et Latina In Gviterna Lvdenda Carmina* (Pierre Phalèse, 1570), requiring a high octave on the third of the four-course guitar is dismissed as a contemporary confusion between other stringing instructions for the cittern and those for the guitar: whilst this possibility has also been suggested elsewhere, and may even be the case, in my view the thesis is simply not sufficiently proven.

Notwithstanding these particular reservations, Page's fine book on the Tudor instrument is undoubtedly a major step forward in early guitar scholarship and ought to be bought by anyone with a genuine interest in the four-course instrument.

Much more has been written about the five-course guitar than the earlier four-course – not only in books but in specialist journals. Nevertheless, Professor Page has mined rich new seams and unearthed much significant material to expand and add to our views of the instrument. The guitar seems to have played a significant role in seventeenth-century England and especially at the Restoration court – even more, perhaps surprisingly, than at the court of *Le Roi Soleil* – and Page elaborates on this in the early chapters of his latest book, *The Guitar in Stuart England*.

The five-course guitar, developed at the end of the sixteenth century, became astonishingly popular throughout most of Europe in the seventeenth and in some parts continued to be so even well into the eighteenth. In England the social revolutions of the time, the Commonwealth (and Stuart exile in France) and the Restoration had a peculiar influence and shaped much of the later usage of the guitar. In *The Guitar in Stuart England* Page identifies some relevant pictorial representations, literary works and archival materials to produce a story of the guitar in England from its early appearances in the Jacobean and Caroline courts, through the Interregnum, into its heyday at the Restoration court and finally on to its decline in the early eighteenth century. The seven chapters cover:

- some of the relevant background found in his earlier book on the Tudor instrument and which sets the scene for the guitar in Jacobean and Caroline England. The guitar in early seventeenth-century England is explored especially focussing on the court masque and town fashion and on the particular suitability of the instrument for use in the simple chordal accompaniments of the new 'baroque' thorough bass. The Jacobean court was especially subject to Spanish influences, as found in some song settings, while the later, Caroline court more so by those from France, including the court masque and also reflecting Henrietta Maria's arrival and later when the guitar became *à la mode*. But the seventeenth century was a period of turmoil and the changes of monarch, the Commonwealth and Restoration certainly had a significant impact on the guitar in England which Page very well, and interestingly, recounts;

- explorations of household accounts in England (principally London) and abroad showing payments for guitar lessons and the purchase of instruments and strings. Studying abroad also directly exposed Englishmen to foreign influences and this continued under the Commonwealth, especially for those wishing to distance themselves from the revolutionary conflict;

- a brief foray into the guitar during the Interregnum leading into a meaty chapter on the Restoration court which was guitaristically dominated for almost twenty years by the acclaimed Francesco Corbetta – the leading player and composer of guitar music of the age. Page, most appropriately, devotes much space to describing Corbetta's influences and music, even touching on his sadly neglected vocal works, as well as describing suitable performance spaces and general court repertoire;

- an exploration of paintings of women playing the guitar, in a novel exposition entitled '*Regarding the Female Guitarist*', but, as Page also points out, it was by no means a woman's instrument alone and, indeed, was often associated with rakish men. The female sitters are invariably depicted strumming in a particularly elegant posture which perhaps suggests that playing the guitar with such strummed chords was considered particularly fit for displaying feminine charms.

- the use of the guitar on the London stage (*'Guitars, Gallants and Gentlewomen'*)

in which Page points out that the instrument was eminently suitable for being played on stage to accompany the action – either with a straightforward (generally strummed) dance or a simple song accompaniment. Unsurprisingly, very little of this repertoire has survived since there was already a large pool of suitable pieces available as required. Such relatively simple works also seem to have been a staple of gallants, were used by ‘City Dames’ and also at young gentlewomen’s schools. One of these was the Chelsea boarding school where Josias Priest was dancing master and where, of course, Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* was performed – perhaps with ‘Gittars’ dances played as noted in the earliest libretto.

- Samuel Pepys’ writings which include much on his involvement with the guitar (he initially disliked it - “methinks it is but a bauble”) and with his Italian guitar teacher, Cesare Morelli, who Pepys eventually commissioned to write out songs with guitar tablature – resulting in one of the largest collection of songs with guitar from this period. Pepys also knew Nicola Matteis who settled in England and wrote the best contemporary treatise about realising a thorough bass on the five-course guitar;

- the guitar book of ‘Princes An’ (later Queen Anne), dating from the 1690s but also containing music from earlier times as well as settings and adaptations of violin and vocal music of the period for solo guitar, is considered in *‘The Autumn of the Five-Course Guitar in England’*. Page traces the last historical images of the instrument in England, such as a 1747 portrait of the Earl of Blessington in ‘antick’ historical dress with a five-course guitar – perhaps even then a sign of its obsolescence.

Finally, there are four substantial appendices covering: Conspectus of Musical Sources and Selected Inventories; Guitars in Probate Inventories of the Seventeenth Century; The Letters of Samuel Pepys concerning the Guitar; The Dupille Manuscript. The checklist of sources is a particularly useful appendix identifying sources of relevant printed books, some appropriate staff notation sources, and guitar tablature manuscripts. In line with the book’s primary focus there is little on related organological matters.

Again, as with his earlier book on the Tudor guitar, the only significant concerns I have about Page’s otherwise generally excellent work, are his assertions and assumptions for the stringing of the five-course instrument (*Introduction*, 10–11). Page readily accepts that this is ‘contentious field’ and that he has therefore usually only employed the stringings recorded in English sources (except, he says, where a clear Italianate influence seems apparent). Since there is only one (just) pre-Restoration source which indicates any tuning in England for the five-course guitar (a note of 1660 by Richard Toward), which Page unequivocally (if questionably) interprets as requiring an instrument with no bourdons whatsoever, this is something of a hostage to fortune for he is then committed to this one tuning for all the earlier seventeenth century musical examples – even for music in the simple strumming (‘thrumming’) style. However, there is still much ongoing debate and the situation is less clear cut than this with continuing foreign influences suggesting a range of tunings were probably employed on the five-course guitar in England (as, indeed, elsewhere) – thus the pre-Restoration guitar may have equally well had bourdons as none. Nevertheless, Page is certainly right in suggesting that, after the Restoration, Corbetta’s tuning with a bourdon only on the fourth course and the high octave on the thumb side (and with no

nonsense about a high octave on the third) became popular – although perhaps still not universal.

Like Page's earlier book on the Tudor guitar, this on the five-course instrument is an outstanding work which should be read by all serious players of the period guitar and, of course, procured by all academic institutions, public libraries and other bodies with any interest in the social and musical history of instruments and their performance.