

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST  
OF AUSTRALIA

Report by **Tim Guster**

2009 Churchill Fellow

To investigate Historical Lutes in Europe

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Signed .....

Dated .....

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## INTRODUCTION

My involvement in music started in a teen rock band. I moved on to folk music, classical guitar, and to writing and performing songs and stories for young children. I sought to expose children to a variety of sounds, which led to instrument making. This activity overtook music-making as an income. My instruments improved and I started selling to musicians demanding the highest standard, especially harps, lutes and hurdy-gurdies.

There is a centuries-old tradition in luthiery and much of the knowledge needed is incorporated in the surviving historical instruments in collections, mostly in Museums. Much academic, conservation and curatorial work has been done to re-discover the secrets which allow luthiers to make historically well informed instruments as close as possible to the original.

There is debate about the development of lutes (and other instruments) – whether to make instruments strictly according to knowledge gained from studying surviving historical examples, or should modern lutes adapt to twenty first century music? Should modern materials be used? Can we really know what typical old lutes sounded like? Does it really matter?

A few of my instruments have found their way to Europe in the hands of Australian Lutenists, and the verdict is that they are quite good but there are short-comings. I wanted to take up the challenge – to make better lutes - which is when I decided to apply to the Churchill Foundation.

I approached Professor John Griffiths, Director of the Early Music Studio at the University of Melbourne, to be a Referee. He agreed with the premise for my application and I thank him for his reference.

My other referee, who I wish to thank, is Tim Kersten, a teacher and player of lute and guitar. Tim has given me much encouragement over the last 20 years to make lutes and his advice has been a guide for me.

A fellow Fellow and fiend, Dr. Greg Johnston, played a major role in encouraging me to undertake this project, and I am indebted to him for that.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### ‘Investigating Historical Lutes in Europe’

The enduring, significant memories which endorse the purpose of my Fellowship are of examining and handling the priceless old musical instruments in Museums, and their dedicated guardians, the curators and conservators.

Attitudes vary, but what stands out in my mind is their willingness to share the knowledge gained from the study of their collections.

Another group, whose impact is ongoing, is the players and performers. It is their passion which, ultimately, vindicates the committing of energy and resources to the study and making of lutes and other instruments.

My visits to museums were not uniformly successful. There are four places where I fully realised my ambition for the Fellowship, while others ranged from very interesting and useful to frustrating.

+At the Musiekinstrumentenmuseum (MIM) in Brussels Anne-Emmanuelle Cuelemans and Joris De Valk set up a work space in the conservators atelier for me to work.

+At the Cite de la Musique in Paris Curator Joel Dugot had prepared a work space for me in the display area of the museum where he changed instruments as I needed them.

+I was welcomed and a space provided in the conservators workshop at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, by conservator Klaus Martius. I was alerted to the museum’s important role by Ian Watchorn, an Australian luthier and conservator who previously worked at the Museum.

+Dr. Rudolf Hopfner, Director – Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna provided me with a work area and access to instruments.

+At all the Museums I visited I was able to buy plans of instruments, books and CD’s . In combination with my observation notes and photos of details of instruments this material will be collated into a resource for instrument makers, musicians and other interested people.

+An increase in the number of people playing lutes in Australia could be influenced by the availability of good, playable, affordable instruments for loan, hire and sale.

+The quality of instruments depends on:- the availability of historical design information; good quality materials –especially tone-woods; traditional construction methods.

+The playing of lutes can be encouraged by:- disseminating information about the historical importance of the instrument; encouraging schools to include lute playing in their music programme; offer resources to allow music instrument making courses to include lute as a choice – ie ‘Make and Play Lute.’

## PROGRAMME

19<sup>th</sup> March - 25<sup>th</sup> March

BELGIUM:

Journee du Luth – Oostmalle

Museum Vleeshuis - Antwerp

Musical Instrument Museum – Brussels

25<sup>th</sup> March – 5<sup>th</sup> April

FRANCE

Musee de Musique - Paris

Visit family – Brittany

5<sup>th</sup> April - 9<sup>th</sup> April

NETHERLANDS

Gemeente Museum

10<sup>th</sup> April - 21<sup>st</sup> April

GERMANY

Museum fur Musikinstrumente der Universitat – Leipzig

Germanisches National Museum - Nurnberg

Visit tone-wood supplier

21<sup>st</sup> April - 26<sup>th</sup> April

AUSTRIA

Kunsthistorisches Museum - Vienna

25<sup>th</sup> April - 1<sup>st</sup> May

ITALY

Museum of Music - Venice

Historic site – Venice

String making -

Visit tone-wood supplier – Desio

Museum of Musical Instruments - Milan

1<sup>st</sup> May - 5<sup>th</sup> May

ENGLAND

Victoria and Albert Museum - London

Royal College of Music - London

Horniman Museum - London

## MAIN BODY

The original idea, to visit Museums to examine old Lutes, developed quite a bit prior to leaving for Europe. I was in frequent contact with a customer/luteplayer, Susan King, who lives in Paris, and she suggested I attend 2 lute-based events in order that I might meet players and other makers of the instrument. The musicians, together with their audiences, are arbiters of what is a good lute, so I agreed to attend these events. I am indebted to Susan for her ideas, her energy and enthusiasm for my project.

### BELGIUM

The first event I attended is held annually at Chateau de Renesse, Oostmalle in Belgium. The event is organised by Frank Schaffels, who, along with other guests, hosted me to a lunch prior to the event. Staying at that country house was the representative of the UK Lute Society, Chris Goodwin. Other guests were players and makers.

The event - 'Journee du Luth' – is comprised of: concerts; workshops; displays/stalls of lutes / guitars by their makers; displays/stalls of music, books and other lute related items.

I am grateful to lute player and event organiser Greet Schamp for the extraordinary effort she made to make me feel welcome. I was driven around, given a place to sleep, and a guided tour of Antwerp, where she lives with her family.

Part of the tour of Antwerp was a visit to the Museum Vleeshuis which has a substantial collection of musical instruments. The few lutes were of minor interest. The feature for me was the bell-making display showing the casting process.

I arrived in Brussels on Monday morning and went straight to the Musical Instrument Museum. This visit was by prior arrangement with Anne Cuelemans and it was agreed that I may closely examine some lutes and guitars in the museum's atelier.

Over the course of 2 days I examined 7 instruments: a 7course lute, M1561, made by Heiber at Venice in 1580; a 13 course lute, M3188, made by Hoffman at Leipzig in 1730; a Theorbo (M255) made by Sellas at Venice in 1635; a 5course guitar made by Deplanque at Lille in 1761; a 5 course guitar whose maker is anonymous; a soprano lute, also by an anonymous maker; and an Arch-lute made by Venere. On the subsequent day I visited the display of instruments, making observations, and purchased plans, some books and CD's.

### FRANCE

I attended the annual Journee du Luth in Paris – a 2 day event with a similar format to the Belgian event. It was held in the Chapele St Thomas 'Aquin, set up with a central seating area facing a stage, surrounded by stalls for instruments, a case-maker, books, plus written and recorded music. There were 6 concerts over the course of 2 days, including a children's ensemble, Lute with voice, Baroque lute/viola de gamba/violin trio, and lute duets. Apart from the concerts, my time was spent discussing aspects of lute making and playing with players and instrument makers.

On Monday 29<sup>th</sup> March I went to the Musee de la Musique, Paris. The curator of instruments, Joel Dugot, by prior arrangement, had set up a place in the Museum for me to examine instruments from the displays. Due to security staff restrictions I was confined to one day of handling instruments. In that time I examined: a Theorbo by Sellas E1028 – Venice 1638; a 13 course Theorbo-Lute by J.C. Hoffman, Leipzig 1720; a Guitar by Vaboam, Paris; and a 7 course lute by Jacob Hess 1586. I took the outlines and other measurements for the 7 course because it is an ideal size for a small beginner's instrument. I visited the museum on two subsequent occasions to survey the rest of the collection and to buy books and CD's. I ordered some plans from the friends of the Museum, who publish and sell them. With Easter coming up and my partner's arrival in Paris, we visited relatives in Auray, Brittany.

NETHERLANDS After a train journey we arrived in Leiden, Holland, where Trevor Howe lives. He is a lute player and customer who bought lutes from me in Australia prior to studying lute with Nigel North at Den Haag. Trevor and his partner kindly gave us accommodation, ran us around, entertained us and fed us.

During the planning stage I included the Germeente Museum in den Haag in preference to the Narodni Museum in Prague because there is a substantial collection in the former, and I could economise on travel and accommodation without diluting the project. My contact at the Germeente, Michael Latcham, had arranged everything for my visit. Just prior to me leaving, however, he declared that he had terminated his employment at the Museum and that I should contact the Director to make another arrangement. I attempted this with emails and phone calls to no avail. It was too late to re-book trains and accommodation and reschedule appointments at other museums, so I decided to simply show up at the museum, which I did, to receive a flat rejection. This was extremely disappointing, so I decided to make good use of the time and went to the Music Library at the University in Den Haag, at the suggestion of Trevor Howe. This proved to be most productive. After two visits I had a list of all the known plans for Musical Instruments and the names of more than a dozen useful, but rare books, some of which I have been able to buy. I also visited Luthier Martin de Witte at his workshop to discuss aspects of lute making.

GERMANY – LEIPZIG I had arranged with staff at the Museum fur Musikinstrumente der Univ. Leipzig to examine some lutes. We arrived in Leipzig on a Sunday, and I made an initial familiarisation visit to the Museum. On the Monday I went there again, as suggested, and had an interview with Dr Esther Fontana who informed me that there was not security staff available to allow me to handle instruments, but that I could examine and photograph them in the exhibition space. There is a qualitative difference between the two activities, but I was left with no choice. I spent two long sessions in the Museum making observations and photographing details of lutes and guitars in the collection. I also bought plans and a set of research observation notes for some of their lutes. In their collection is a Baroque lute by Vendelio Venere, and another by Jonas Stehelin, a lute by Joachim Tielke with the sound-board removed showing the barring. There are guitars by Sellas and Railich, as well as quite a few Romantic period and other later made guitars. There is a Theorbo by Wendelin Tiefenbrucker, a Chitorrone by Magnus Tiefenbrucker, a Luitoattiorbato by Matteo Sellas, a lute by Eberspracher, a Theorbo by J C Hoffmann, and various lutes by Thomas Edlinger from Prague.

GERMANY – BERLIN Not being able to handle instruments in Leipzig left me with spare time so I decided to go to the Instrument Museum in Berlin – a 2 hour train journey. It was not feasible to pre-arrange access to the instruments, so I was content to spend most of the day in the display photographing lutes and guitars. I also bought some plans. They have Lutes by Koch, Stegner, M Fux, and a theorbo and viola d’amore by Hoffman. There is a rare Orgelleier, or Organisee – a hurdy gurdy with a built in organ, as well as a couple of Louvet Hurdy Gurdies. I saw Viola da Gambas by Tielke, Barak Norman and G Karpp amongst an interesting array of early key-boards – including harpsichords and virginals. There is an impressive range of early guitars from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic period instruments, including German, French, Italian and Spanish makers

GERMANY – NUREMBERG Fellow Australian luthier, Ian Watchorn, had been very generous with good advice regarding my Fellowship, and his contact in Nuremberg, Klaus Martius, proved to be most productive. Ian and Klaus worked together in the 1980’s. Klaus went out of his way to make sure I had everything I needed. I was able to first look at the instruments, including some in the basement awaiting restoration, and make a choice of which lutes I wanted to examine.

I examined the following: a Gross Octave Bass Lute by Michielle Harton MI44, Padua 1602; a 5 course Guitar by Giorgio Sellas , Venedig 1624; an 11 course lute by Tielke; a theorbo-lute by Martin Hoffman, Leipzig 169?; a Gothic Harp – maker anonymous around 1600?; aTheorbo-Lute MIR903 by Leopold Widhalm 1755 Nurnberg; and an 11 course lute by Pietro Railich in Venedig 1644.

Klaus and his fellow conservators have done a lot of research on instruments in the museum’s collection, especially by using scanning technology to show internal dimensions. I was given access to all the research which has been done on the instruments I examined.

North of Nuremberg is Bubenreuth where I visited Tonewood supplier Andreas Gleissner, a family business. I selected a number of Spruce soundboards and some figured Maple, for lute ribs.

AUSTRIA – VIENNA The instrument collection in Vienna is part of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, housed in a monumental set of buildings built in Italian Renaissance style, opened in 1891 as a memorial to Habsberg patronage. The director, Rudolph Hopfner, was most generous with his time and set me up in a room to examine instruments. These include : Lute by Hans Frey, Nurnberg ca1500 C33; Lute by Wendelin Tiefenbrucker Padua 1582 C36; Chitorrone by Magno Tiefenbrucker, Venedig C45; Lute by Vendelinus nVenere, Venedig 1626; and a Gothic Harp – Italian 16?? I spent considerable time in the display area examining and photographing instruments; including several hurdy gurdies and a good selection of guitars from the Romantic period back to the Baroque era including examples by Sellas, Stadler, and Voboam – maker of an unusual and rare Doppelguitar. There is also the George Gerle 6 course lute with an ivory back - too delicate to remove from its case.

## ITALY – VENICE

Arriving in Venice was quite a shock to this novice traveller. My intention, in part, was to experience the atmosphere of a Renaissance city which was one of the prime places for lute making in Europe. There is evidence of the craft as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century and a trade into Germany across the Alps, especially to Fussen in Bavaria. Most of the Venetian lute makers were German, it is thought, and their workshops were more akin to factories mass-producing lutes for a wider European market. One legendary family name in lute making is Tieffenbrucker, and there is an address in Venice I wanted to find – the probable site of Magno Tieffenbruckers workshop. I have seen photographs of the building and have an address but I failed to identify the exact location. None quite matched the information I had.

Another objective in going via Venice was to visit the factory of Aquila strings in Vicenza. I contacted Mimmo Peruffo, founder of that company, and well known for his research into producing strings for early instruments. He was unable to accommodate me in my request to see the string-making process - a disappointment to me but I understand his need to protect hard-won secrets in that industry.

There is a small but impressive museum of musical instruments in Venice which I was able to survey and photograph. Of interest to me were some Italian Ghironda (Hurdy Gurdies) of lute back design, a Venetian Harp, a Guitar made by Guadagnini, a number of instruments from the viol family and some chittorone, the Italian version of a Theorbo, in a reconstruction of a Luthiers workshop.

Some research into instrument makers of Venice has been carried out by 'Venice Research' and their publications include several books, available from the museum. I tried to make contact with a representative but their premises were closed and I had no response from telephone calls or emails.

ITALY – MILAN My main purpose for stopping in Milan was to visit a tone-wood supplier north of that city in Desio. I was picked up one morning by Marta Rivolta and driven to her family business, where I was given free access to choose Spruce, Maple and Yew woods for lute making.

I was aware that there were some Museum instruments in Milan but was pleasantly surprised by the scope and size of that collection, which is housed in the spectacular Castello Sforzesco Museum. They have an extensive collection of Italian guitars - Chitarra - from Milan, as well as Naples, Brescia and Torino as well as some later period –Romantic - guitars. There are some very good examples of Ghironda (Hurdy Gurdies) which interest me. There is a range of large lutes by lesser known Italian luthiers – Liuto a Doppio by Petrus Ariasi; several archlutes by anonymous makers; an arch lute by Joseph de Camitis, Rome 1705; two Tioirbo by Giorgio lungman, Milan; some Milanese Mandola Bassa. All this in addition to good ranges of key-boards and bowed strings

## ENGLAND – LONDON

Victoria and Albert Museum - Prior to leaving I had arranged with James Yorke at the Victoria and Albert Museum to examine some instruments in their collection. A decision was subsequently made to remove the collection from the Museum. This was done despite a petition and protest from across the musical community and the instruments were put into storage. I was assured by James that I could still have access, right up until about two weeks before I was to arrive in London, when I tried to confirm my appointment and was told that it was physically impossible to get to the instruments. I was able to at least buy some plans.

Horniman Museum - I visited the Horniman Museum's collection and was pleasantly surprised. Despite obvious space limitations they have a huge and comprehensive range of musical instruments, but only a few of interest to my project. I was unable to get hands-on access, but am able to buy plans. They have a beautiful J C Hoffman Baroque 13course lute ; there is an arch lute which is thought to be an adaptation of a tenor lute by Wendelin Tieffenbrucker; there is a tenor lute by Arnold Dolmetsch in London in 1893 – part of the revival of interest in old instruments of that era. There is a 17<sup>th</sup> century, highly decorated Guitar, probably Italian; a very good Hurdy Gurdy (Vielle a roué) from 1870 France; a 'Dital' harp made by John Egan c1820, and the best collection of concertinas I have ever seen.

Royal College of Music - The curator of the College's collection, Jenny Nex, immediately agreed to let me examine instruments from this collection. I was made to feel welcome – it was made clear to me that this sort of activity is part of the Museum's purpose – education.

Their collection is not the biggest, but it has some important instruments and there are some gems amongst the Guitars and Lutes, as well as other categories of instruments.

My first instrument to handle was a much admired Tieffenbrucker Chittorone in a very delicate state. I had to be especially careful with it, but managed to record all the features I needed.

The next instrument was a small, delicate Vaboam Guitar. It has an unusual back with deep concave ribs. The finger-board and head have decorations of symmetrical waved purfling which cross to form a pattern. Unusually it has no rosette.

The third instrument was a Guitar by Belchior Diaz with the full Baroque decoration treatment – tortoise-shell veneer back and sides, black/white patterned purfling around the sound-board and neck edges, mother-of-pearl petal shapes on ebony finger-board, layered parchment rosette, 'moustache' bridge decorations, complex ebony/ivory patterns on the neck back and around the pieces of tortoise-shell of the back and sides.

The rest of the collection featured a Wendelin Venere lute with the sound-board removed, revealing detail of the barring; a guitar attributed to Jacob Stadler 1650 with intricate and complex engraved ivory on the back, sides and neck-back; a 17<sup>th</sup> century guitar attributed to one of the Vaboam family, with fine, complex engraved ivory floral patterns on the back of the body, the body sides and back of the neck, and on the finger-board and around the

sound-hole. There are other guitars, equally highly decorated – Italian 1630, another from the Donaldson Collection, another from Paris c1760, an 18<sup>th</sup> century Chitarra battente – Italian. There are some Romantic period guitars of interest, a nice John Egan Irish Harp c1829, and a Welsh triple harp by Basset Jones from 1838.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The handling of instruments gave me a clear understanding of what I am aiming for when making a new instrument based on the originals. The workmanship of the ancient luthiers is an aspect which stands out in my mind. Without the benefit of modern machinery they cut, fitted and finished timber as finely as any contemporary maker working at the highest level. Despite the advent of sophisticated machinery and electric hand tools, however, the craft has remained much the same.

One major difference between the early production of lutes, and other instruments, and contemporary instrument making is the scale of mass production in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Inventories of some of the famous early makers' workshops are published, and the numbers of components and finished instruments is in the hundreds and, for some things, thousands. There was an early form of mass production, and there is evidence that different grades of instruments were made. I would argue, however, that the Renaissance and Baroque period producers were craft industries as distinct from the mechanised process churning out instruments today. Common to both eras is the individual luthiers working in their workshops. Some are family businesses and there may be apprentices employed, with the business passed to the next generation.

Lutes were, more or less, the Renaissance and Baroque equivalent of what the electric guitar is now; they were ubiquitous in much of Europe and, in various guises, the Arab world and beyond. A weakness in the comparison – lutes with electric guitars - is that lutes were probably not as available to those of lesser financial means, whereas electric guitars are affordable by almost anyone because of mass production. Many of the instruments I saw were highly decorated with valuable materials – ebony, ivory, mother of pearl, and turtle shell. It is hard to believe that these were typical instruments of their time, and it has been suggested that well used, everyday lutes most probably have not survived and that only showpiece instruments have made it to the display cases. I think there is a lot of truth in that analysis (not mine), and that original, typical examples of lutes are extremely rare. Luthiers often talk about particular lutes as being in their original state, or of instruments not having been adapted to meet present musical styles. Lutes which are in collections and are thought to be in entirely original condition are well known amongst makers and players. To add to the complexity there are deliberately made, but obvious, fakes amongst the collections, although I'm certain I saw none.

The criteria for my selection of instruments to examine, therefore, centred on authenticity, especially of the internal details, and more especially sound-board barring. This is one of the key determinants of the quality of sound produced by a lute or guitar. Research done on the original neck and peg-box(es) also is a guide to much about these old lutes. I gathered a lot of information on these details, and other measurements with a view to systematically

refining this aspect of my lute construction.

While I am willing to make one-off anachronistic lutes, I have firmed in my view that the traditionally designed and made instruments are the ideal for playing the vast repertoire of Renaissance and Baroque lute music.

There is a recent development in lute making, the Luito Forte, and its proponents claim that a louder lute is needed to cater for bigger audiences and auditoriums. Its detractors say that it is a guitar with a lute shape. I tend to agree with the latter. Perhaps a comparison could be made with the decline of the Viol family in the face of competition from the louder Violin family of instruments. Maybe there is a future for the loud lute, but I have a strengthened commitment to concentrate on making plain, good-sounding lutes at affordable prices, without abandoning the essence of what a lute should be.

I think it is possible to engender more interest in lute playing in Australia. There is already a small, committed and enthusiastic solid core of people playing and teaching lute. Some Australian lutenists play their instruments at the highest level and have international reputations, with concert performances, CD sales and teaching of the instrument. The holy grail of luthiery is to get the world's top players to buy one's instruments. As it is in sport or the theatre there is a process to get to the top and for guitar players, pianists, violinists etc there is a vast range of affordable instruments from which to choose, increasing in quality and price as they progress. In the area of lute playing there is a small but constant demand for affordable instruments and I suspect that a disincentive to a student taking up lute playing is the difficulty of getting a suitable instrument. The response I often get is that lutes are not affordable for a student, so my contribution to the expansion of lute playing in Australia could be to provide good quality student instruments which could be hired until a student is able to buy an instrument.

Another way of increasing the amount of lute playing could be to establish a programme, perhaps in a school(s), where young people can learn lute playing. Although the resources for teaching instrumental music in schools have been contracting there is a persistent interest in early music. Much of the music written for lute is played on modern design guitars. My proposal is to offer the chance to play lute music on the correct instrument by making the instruments available, perhaps on a rental basis.

Occasionally I have been approached by people wishing to make an instrument – harps, lutes, guitars etc., and I have given what help I am able to, at the time. I have accumulated a lot of information about lutes and early guitars, and have some experience in making them. Although there is no formal training or certified qualifications for Luthiery in Australia, there are opportunities to learn and teach the craft. One of the ways I can pursue my goal of increasing interest in lute paying is to offer my expertise in this area to the institutions which offer Musical Instrument Making courses. I am aware that TAFE have such a course and that some High School Tech. Studies courses have included the making of musical instruments.

General awareness of the existence of lutes is quite low, so there is a need to promote the

instrument as a real choice for playing, listening-to and making. In the past I have occasionally been asked to talk to community and school groups and I will continue to make myself available to such groups. I am working on a power-point presentation in preparation for such invitations

In conclusion, my Churchill Fellowship has stimulated the enthusiasm I have for encouraging lute playing in Australia by pursuing the plan outlined above. The richness and diversity of a society depends on people being free to choose different ways of expression – in their work and in their leisure, and this is especially true, not only of the performing arts, but of the arts generally. The main driving force in my various music related activities has always been a desire to facilitate people in their various musical pursuits at all levels of achievement. My good fortune in receiving a Churchill Fellowship has greatly boosted my knowledge and awareness, particularly in the area of constructing lutes and other instruments, and the issues which surround this activity.