GRESHAM COLLEGE

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BUYING, SELLING AND OWNING GUITARS IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

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We are standing right by the edge of the Thames. The year is 1545, the weather (probably) is bleak, and there is a cruel wind coming off the grey river. Our task is to ensure that the hold of each ship contains exactly what its master claims as it unloads here at three-crane's wharf. Many of the commodities we may expect to find will be relatively expensive and even luxury goods, for with a few exceptions Tudor England does not have a consolidated reputation for producing finely finished commodities; its exports are mostly in the form of raw materials such as cloth of many kinds, honey, tin, rabbit skins, alabaster, pitch and flax. Among the imported fine goods in today's shipments are numerous musical instruments, for several vessels have come in from Antwerp, a distribution port for instruments made in many parts of Western Europe. Searching through the holds we find clavichords, boxes of harp strings, lutes in their cases literally by the dozen, packets of the fine strings needed for the top courses of lutes (the so-called *minikins*), viols and virginals. With all those instruments duly listed, we move on to the great wealth of other material being brought in that day: astrolabes, cotton, cloves, combs, chessmen, frankincense, French hats, and you can see that I have not reached further into the alphabet than the letter F.

You will also see that we did not find any guitars. In case you are wondering what makes me believe there were none in those shipments on the day I asked you to imagine, my answer is very simple: I have looked at the printed book of rates that Henry VIII's government issued in 1545, listing the duty to be paid on all imported goods. You may remember from my last lecture that the standard name for the guitar in Tudor England was 'gittern', and it simply does not appear in that book among the commodities on which duty was to be paid. That does not *necessarily* mean none were being imported; it was quite beyond the exiguous resources of Tudor government, with its quills, candles and bundles of papers, to make a comprehensive record of imports. Yet the absence of the word 'gittern' does imply, I think, that if any guitars were being imported in 1545 then the quantity was (as yet) too small to make the revenue to be collected on them worth the cost of collecting it.

The first page of your handout lists what we actually find in the rate book of 1545, and as you can see the gittern is absent.

Instruments and strings in *The rates of the custome house bothe inwarde and outwarde the dyfference of measures and weyghts and other co[m]modities very necessarye for all marchantes to knowe newly correctyd and imprin*ted (1545)

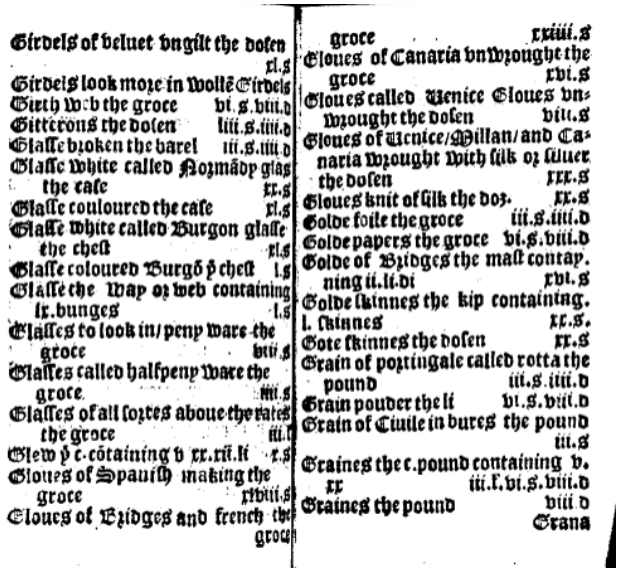
	£	s	d
Clarycordes the payre		2	
Harpe strynges the boxe		10	
Leutes with caces the dossen		48	
Leute stringes called mynikins the groce			22
Vials the pece		4	
Virginales the payre		3	4

But in the year 1558 Philip and Mary issued a revised list to keep abreast of price rises, and now the gittern appears. That is the second item on the first page of your handout.

	£	s	d
Claricordes the pair		6	8
Gitterons the dosen		53	4
Lewtes with cases voc cullen lutes the dosen	3		
Lewtes with cases voc venis lutes the dosen	12		
Lewte stringes voc mynikins the grosse		10	
Vialles the pece		6	8
Virginalles single the paire		16	8
Virginalles doble the paire		33	4

The marked increase in the sums relative to 1545 reveals the substantial rise in customs dues (an increase of some 75% overall) that was part of a minor revolution in royal finances during the later 1550s. Some of the new entries are obviously designed to secure higher payments on goods at the luxury end of the market; Venice lutes, for example, now yield much more subsidy than the cheaper Cologne variety, a benefit to the Crown that the older and simpler classification did not procure. In general terms, that is why the later list is longer than the earlier, and more discerning, but the gittern remains an exception nonetheless, for it is the only species of instrument in the 1558 book that is not represented in the earlier volume. Lutes, clavichords, harp-strings, viols and virginals had all appeared before, but not gitterns,. To be sure, the 1545 inventory was probably inadequate when it was published, just as the 1558 version cannot have been complete; taken as they stand, however, the two books imply that a new (or newly invigorated) supply of guitars was coming into the Port of London by 1558.

The theory that guitars were relatively new in England at that time agrees quite well with a remark in the the autobiography of Thomas Whythorne, the Tudor musician whom we met in the last lecture. Whythorne reports (and I quote), that he learned to play on 'þe Gyttern, and Sittern. which ij° instruments wẹr þen stranʒ in England, and þerfọr þe mọr dezyred and esteemed'. He is referring to the late 1540s or early 1550s. After this, gitterns remained in the printed books of rates, under that name, until the end of the sixteenth century and a little beyond. The third page of your handout shows a page from the rate book issued in 1574, under Elizabeth I, and there they are – by the dozen. This will give you some idea what these intriguing documents actually look like. The use of black-letter type is intended to give the appearance of royal authority, which of course the text did actually possess. And incidentally, this is one of the rare pages in the book where the compilers have achieved what we would now call alphabetical order; much of the time the clerks did not achieve (or did not attempt) alphabetical sequence beyond the first letter or perhaps the first two. Alphabetical order t*hroughout* the letters of a word was an administrative innovation - an exertion of rational powers, you might say – that the Tudor clerks were slow to make.



Girdels of velvet vngilt the dosen xl.s
Girdels lookmore in Wollē Girdels
Girth Web the groce vi.s.viii.d
Gitterons the dosen liii.s.iiii.d
Glasse broken the barel iii.s.iiii.d
Glasse white called Normādy glas the case xx.s
Glasse coulored the case xl.s
Glasse white called Burgon glasse the chest xl.s
Glasse coloured Burgō þ chest l.s
Glasse the Way or web containing ix.bunges l.s
Glasses to look in/ peny ware the groce viii.s
Glasses called halfpeny ware the groce iiii.s
Glasses of all sortes aboue the rates the groce iii.l
Glew þ c.cōtaining v xx.xii.li x.s
Gloues of Spanish making the groce xviii.s
Gloues of Bridges and french the groce xxiiii.s
Gloues of Canaria vnWrought the groce xvi.s
Gloues called Venice Gloues vnWrought the dosen viii.s
Gloues of Venice/Millan/ and Canaria Wrought with silk or siluer the dosen xxx.s
Gloues knit of silk the dos. xx.s
Golde foile the groce iii.s.iiii.d
Golde papers the groce vi.s.viii.d
Golde of Bridges the mall containing ii.li.di xvi.s
Golde skinnes the kip containing. l. skinnes xx.s.
Gote skinnes the dosen xx.s
Grain of portingale called rotta the pound iii.s.iiii.d
Grain pouder the li vi.s.viii.d
Grain of Civile in bures the pound iii.s
Graines the c.pound containing v. xx iii.l.vi.s.viii.d
Graines the pound viii d
Grana

Paduana au joly bois **& Galliarde. From Morlaye, Quatriesme Livre**

You may remember, from my last lecture, Ronsard's reference to a *guiterre* marked *en chifre*, and Edward Courtenay's *ziffre*…*tailée sur une guitarre*. This suggest that some of the more luxurious guitars were inlaid with abstract designs or monograms like the fine boxes or embroidered purses. The workshop of a Parisian instrument maker in 1589 contained gitterns adorned with marquetry and a carved head, both luxury features designed to enhance the pleasure of ownership; instruments without either head or inlay were simply listed as *guiternes communes* and were of less value. London supported one of the most cosmopolitan markets for foreign goods in Europe, to the despair of conservative commentators, and the instrument-makers of France and Spain would have found many customers for their work in England. 'Some tyme we followe the fasshyon of the Frenche men', wrote Thomas Becon in 1543, while 'another time we wil haue a tricke of the Spanyyardes'. The gittern was once such 'fasshyon' and 'tricke'. Modern replicas, for reasons of cost, are often more plain, but may be very fine; on the second page of your handout I include an image of one made by Alexander Batov.

So who owned such instruments during the Tudor period? We might make a beginning with Henry VIII's last victim, the courtier poet Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (third page of the handout). After Surrey's execution for high treason, in 1547, the government swiftly arranged for his chattels to be inventoried. The result includes a 'Gyttorne' listed with various 'necessary Implements' such as hangings, tapestries and cushions. In 1532/3, Surrey had spent a year at the French court with the bastard son of Henry VIII, Henry Fitzroy; both were accepted within the intimate circle of king Francis I of France. Was Surrey's 'Gyttorne' a gift from those days in France?

Seven years later, a ciphered guitar (as you may remember) was passing between two high members of the English court, Edward Courtenay and Peter Carew. I said when we last met, and will briefly say again, that this subterfuge would scarcely have been contemplated if there were anything unusual about such an instrument, or such an exchange, in court circles during the first year of Queen Mary's reign. The year 1554 was also the time when the court lost Philip van Wilder, keeper of royal instruments and the musician who may have shown all Tudor courtiers what the gittern could accomplish in skilled hands. He is almost certainly the subject of an anonymous elegy for an expert string-player named 'Phillips', which was published in 1557. The poet calls upon gitterns as well as lutes to fall silent now that the master is no more; you have the text on the fourth page of your handout.

Of the death of Phillips

Bewaile with me all ye that haue profest,
Of musicke tharte by touche of coarde or winde:
Lay down your lutes and let your gitterns rest,
Phillips is dead whose like you can not finde.
Of musicke much exceadyng all the rest,
Muses therefore of force now must you wrest,
Your pleasant notes into an other sounde,
The string is broke, the lute is dispossest,
The hand is colde, the bodye in the grounde.
The lowring lute lamenteth now therfore,
Phillips her frende that can her touche no more.

Moving on just a little in time, and reaching again up to the apex of the Tudor court, a document of 1559 shows that Queen Elizabeth received a 'Chest with thre Getternes' as a New Year's gift. They were put into the care of a Groom of the Privy Chamber and court lutenist, Thomas Litchfield. These were doubtless luxurious instruments, for anything less would have been highly inappropriate; in 1579 Litchfield himself had given the queen 'a very fayre Lute the backeside and necke of mother of perle the Case of crymsen vellat enbrawdered with flowers and the inside grene vellate'; no such identifying description was necessary for the three gitterns, for there was no mistaking them once they had been inventoried as a triple set in a chest. The gift of three implies that the gittern was cultivated in circles around the monarch at Windsor, Greenwich, Hampton Court and elsewhere, and that the instruments could be built in sets of different sizes. This is strikingly confirmed by a 1563 inventory of goods at Raby Castle, near Durham, belonging to Henry Neville, Earl of Westmoreland/ Despite the faded and damaged state of this paper record, now in the National Archives at Kew, one may read that the items found included 'j caise wth iij gittrons'. Here therefore is a second assemblage of three gitterns, kept in a 'caise' by the Nevilles just as the first was presented to Queen Elizabeth in a 'Chest'.

We need to keep in mind just how high the ambitions of guitar players could be at this date. The great compositions of Franco-Flemish masters like Josquin des Prez lie behind much of the French music for guitar as surely as the streets and churches of Bruges or Ghent can be seen in the background of the great Flemish painters. Here is piece taken from a section of counterpoint in a great work by Josquin, *Benedicta es Coelorum Regina*. We have taken it from a print of the 1550s, where it is presented without any sense that the guitar has endemic shortcomings that must ultimately defeat such an enterprise, or make it appear quixotic:

Le duo de *Benedicta* (Josquin des Pres's Motet*: Benedicta es Coelorum Regina*) from Gorlier's *Le Troysieme Livre*

The year 1574 reveals the guitar in use among gentleman servants at court and in the service of the great. In that year a writer with a court position, Edward Hellowes, Groom of the Leash, published a translation of Latin letters by a Spanish prelate Antonio de Guevara. In one of the letters Guevara advises his correspondent that it is not wise to entrust any business to amorous young men because they 'walk hither and thither, peering round all the corners of houses, lingering about the windows and threshold of their sweetheart with sighs, discreet coughs and song by night'. When our man Edward Hellowes came to translate this passage he decided that this evocation of young men in love needed the addition of a gittern:

> If you will credit me, to men inamored you shall neuer commend your busines: For his office is not to be occupied in other affaires, but in writing letters, watching at corners, playing on gitterns, climing on walles, and vewing of windowes.

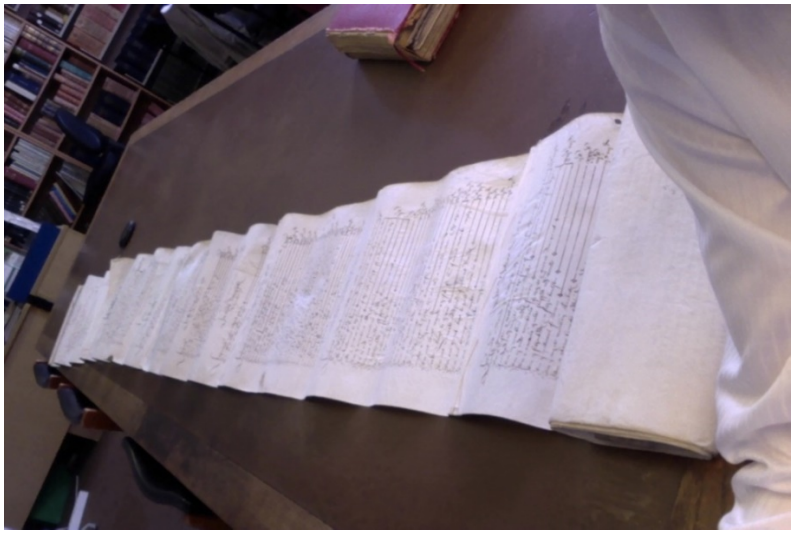
Hellowes is presumably thinking of youths in England, perhaps including grooms and other gentlemen in court service like himself.

These sources suggest that the gittern may be assigned a place in 'court culture'. That term conveys more than what took place in the chambers and corridors of the royal residences during long summer afternoons, or the winter revels; the culture of the Tudor court comprised everything in the 'court-centred, elitist and consensual' environment around the monarch with its play as well as it policy, its diversions as well as its deliberations, whose integration was essential for the political process to function. In such a context there could never be anything entirely trivial about a new court fashion that might spread to young gentlemen with court posts, to members of the Privy Council when home on their country estates, and beyond to their families and wards. Ruler and ruled could be bound together as much by their shared understanding of what was pleasant and fashionable as by what was legal and necessary.

Beyond the confines of the court we look first to those who were necessarily drawn to it: the members of the gentry families that served the crown in some capacity while sustaining a life as landowners, keepers of dependents and employers on their estates. An early owner of this kind was Sir William More, Member of Parliament at various times for Guildford and holder of many public offices including chamberlain of the

Exchequer and Justice of the Peace for Surrey. More received the Queen in his home at Loseley House on several occasions, where his panelled library still survives with a carved overmantel showing the royal arms and initials; there is also a sombre portrait there showing him with a white beard and facing a skull, a sharp *memento mori* (inviting an obvious pun upon his name). More's own inventory of 1556 reveals that his parlour contained a portrait of Henry VIII, hangings of green silk, a chessboard, various items of furniture, virginals, a base lute and 'a gittorne' that he valued at eight shillings, the kind of price perhaps only explicable in terms of exotic woods and inlay. With his substantial library of classical texts and his collections of verse in English and Italian, More was a mid-Tudor gentleman of some scope, witnessed further by the *all'antica* decorative panels that he possessed in the best Anglo-Florentine taste.

Another owner in high royal servant was Sir Richard Worsley of Appuldurcombe, Captain of the Isle of Wight and therefore responsible for a highly sensitive area of the realm's coastal defences at Portsmouth and the Channel Islands. Upon his decease in 1565, officials came to the Worsley mansion on the island to inventory his goods, but it was not going to be a quick affair; he was a person of consequence, if somewhat overshadowed by the man his widow had chosen for her next husband, Francis Walsingham. Twenty-two membranes of parchment were needed to make a record, satisfactory to all parties, of Worsley's many possessions (page 4 of the handout). A section of the roll entitled 'Aparelle and Stuffe that were in divers places' includes various musical instruments; there was 'an ould paire of Virginalls', a 'Collayne lute with a case locke and kaye', valued at ten shillings, and a 'Gitthorne' worth five.



The case of Sir William Petre (d. 1572), the son of a Devon tanner who rose to become a senior figure in the government under four monarchs, serving as senior secretary to the Privy Council during his later years, is one of the best-documented owners in this high-ranking group. A book of accounts, kept by Petre's London steward John Keyme and now in the Essex County Record Office, records a payment for a viol and some accessories on 11 June 1550, together with a gittern:

June Wednesday the xj day

	s	d
for a small vyall	13	4
for a gyttron	6	
for a canvas bagge to put the viall in		4
for vyall strings		12
for the frenchemans charges		4

The gittern was considerably less expensive than the viol, but the price nonetheless amounts to more than half what Petre paid some of his servants at Ingatestone (Essex) for an entire quarter. The instrument was perhaps a present for his wife, Anne Browne, for one of his daughters or perhaps a gift to himself. Whatever the case may be, the payment 'for the frenchemans charges' is arresting. Another book of Petre's accounts, kept by the

steward of his principal seat at Ingatestone, shows that this 'Frenchman' was no mere courier. A wage list for 18 October 1550 gives the Michaelmas payments due to a wide range of dependents and servants from a curate to a cartboy, and here a Frenchman appears again, presumably the same individual. Now he is named and is clearly a musician:

To John þe frenchman þt playeth on þe instruments 10s

John had resided in Petre's household since at least mid-June, and was still at Ingatestone in mid-November when the accounts record the purchase of his new shoes. The significance of this emerges from Petre's London account book for the period 22 April to 19 May 1550, just before the record of the purchase of the gittern. There is in fact nothing there, just a blank, for during this period Petre was in France on diplomatic business. Petre sailed on 23 April, his second trip that year, and met the French court at Amiens. He left for home on or about 12 May. It may be no coincidence that Petre acquired his gittern so soon after the second of his two diplomatic journeys to France in 1550. The year of that journey is precisely the one that offers a first glimpse of the delicate and considered art that literate performance on the *guiterne* had become in France.

Here are two pieces drawn from French prints published not long after the time of Petre's diplomatic mission. The first is a freely composed fantaisie, while the second is a dance. Here was music to show Petre that a gittern would allow him to carry home the sound of a continental dance band in a servant's saddle bag.

From Le Roy & Ballard's *Quart Livre*, *Fantasi*e and *Bransles de Champaigne* (20r-21v)

I have time for just one example of gittern ownership among gentlemen, and the most curious. In 1562 Francis Sauners was allowed to take a gittern into the Tower of London while a prisoner there and to play it during his captivity. This is revealed by a letter from the Warden of the Tower to the Queen's Secretary, Sir William Cecil, in which the Warden jokes that the Tower Lieutenant 'shal be fayne to take the sound' of Saunders' gittern for payment of his 'dyete', meaning his food and fuel (Plate 11). This may be humour of a kind, but it is no more light-hearted than we would expect from a man who administered the most ominous of all the Tudor fortresses. Even there, it seems, the guitar could be a comfort!