

## The Collection of Musical Instruments of Sir Nicholas Shackleton

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**S**ir Nicholas John Shackleton FRS (1937-2006) gave invaluable support to HSS from the very beginning of the Society's existence, as did his wife, Vivien Law (1954-2002), a key figure in the advancement of linguistic historiography in the UK and beyond. Nick's standing as a geologist — he was Director of the Godwin Institute of Quaternary Research at Cambridge — was recognised the world over. But there was another dimension to his life: he was one of the best amateur clarinetists in the UK and an inveterate collector of musical instruments, particularly woodwinds, and more especially clarinets. Over 40 years he built up an enormous collection, eventually totalling more than 900 instruments, of which over 800 were clarinets and derivatives of clarinets. His contributions to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* are a testimony to his erudition and enthusiasm for the clarinet. After his death, his executors and family decided that the entire collection, with some supporting funding for curatorial and research work, should be gifted to the University of Edinburgh.

Saturday 23 June 2007 would have been Nick's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. On that day, members of his family — his sisters Penelope and Annabel and his niece Sophie — formally presented the collection to the University. It was received by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Timothy O'Shea. The wider context was the 3-day 'Clarinet and Woodwind Colloquium 2007', organised by Professor Arnold Myers of the Edinburgh University Collection of Historical Musical Instruments.

The Shackleton Collection, part of which is now already on permanent display, with the remainder still in hundreds of boxes, is the largest single-site collection of clarinets anywhere in the world. The instruments range in age from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century to 2003; their provenances are mainly Europe and Britain, with contributions from the USA and Japan.

At the presentation, William Waterhouse, the bassoonist and author/editor of works on historical musical instruments, spoke about the motivations of musical-instrument collectors, their historical insights into the design and manufacture of instruments, and their aesthetic sensitivities to changing instrumental tone colours over two and a half centuries or more. Keith Puddy, Professor of Clarinet and Classical Clarinet at the Royal Academy of Music, demonstrated three such clarinets: a 2-keyed boxwood clarinet from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by an anonymous maker; a clarinet by Jacques François Simiot c. 1810; and a Boehm-system clarinet, made in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, that Frederick ('Jack') Thurston (1901-1953), the former principal clarinetist of the Philharmonia Orchestra, had used. (Of the three, I preferred the 18<sup>th</sup>-century instrument for its mellow quality and range of dynamics.) Dr Colin Lawson, Director of the Royal College of Music, and an eminent clarinetist and historiographer of the instrument, spoke of the tensions between performances on authentic historical instruments and on modern copies, and of the tensions created by the importation of modern styles of music-making into the performance of earlier works. Heike Fricke, of the Musikinstrumenten-Museum in Berlin, who has been responsible for much of the

cataloguing of the Collection, outlined the taxonomies that emerged during this process: for example, the different styles of 19<sup>th</sup>-century English clarinets in terms of key-work, bore, etc, compared with those of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century European manufacturers.

Nick was a knowledgeable and experienced collector, and the vastness of what he amassed can be judged from a few simple statistics. For example, in the Collection there are 404 *Bb* clarinets, 38 *Eb* clarinets, 12 basset horns, 15 bass clarinets and 3 contra-bass clarinets. These figures are staggering. The other instruments in the Collection include piccolos, flutes, flageolets, oboes, bassoons, French horns, a chanter for bagpipes, tarogatos and an octavin.

*A Catalogue of the Sir Nicholas Shackleton Collection* (ISBN 978-907635-58-1) is now available, thanks to the work of Heike Fricke and her team, in tandem with the photographic expertise of Dr Raymond Parks. It is, inevitably, large (809 pages) and hugely informative. The text of the *Catalogue*, without the illustrations, is on the web at <http://homepages.ed.ac.uk/ezhm01/ubls.html>.

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