

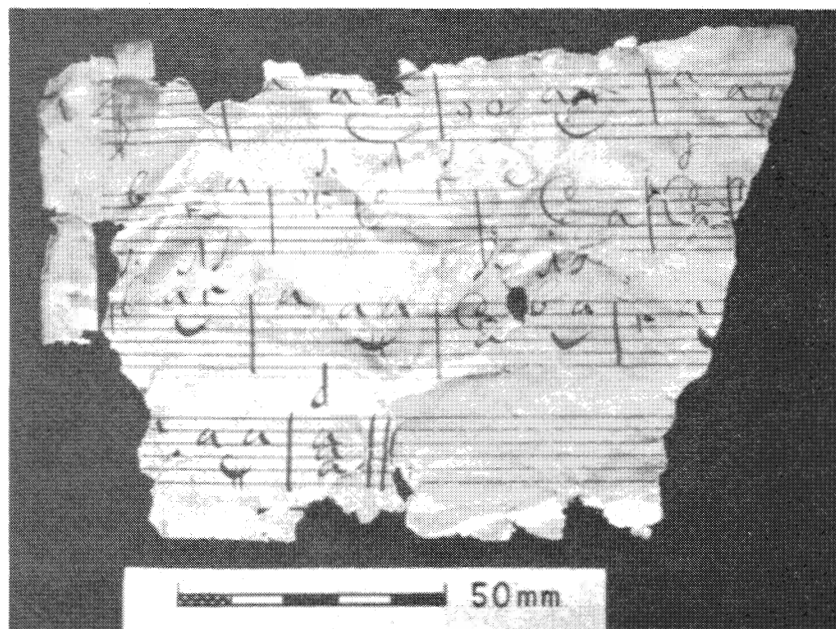
A Seventeenth-Century Music Manuscript from Ratby, Leicestershire

by *A. Graf and D. A. Ramsey*

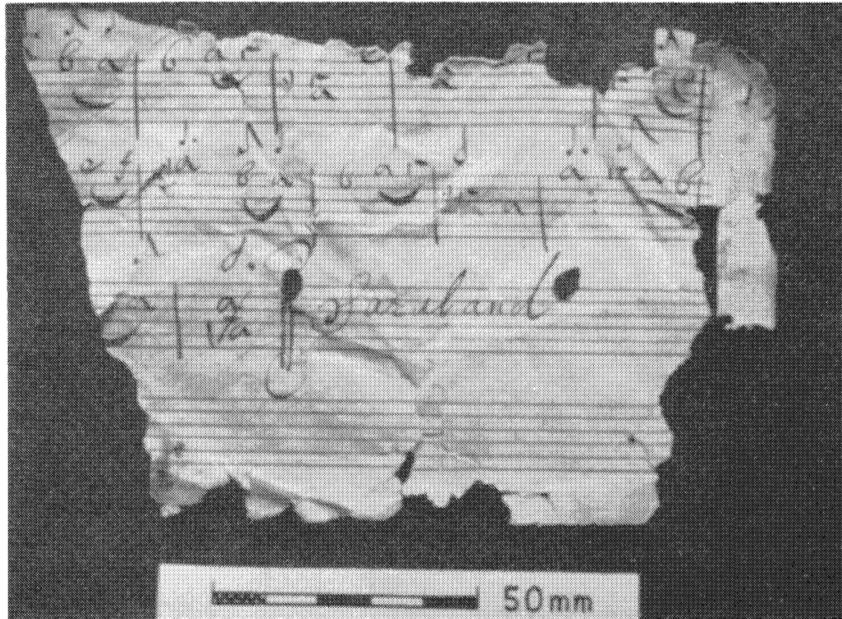
A fragment of music manuscript containing two short pieces of hitherto-unknown seventeenth-century dance music for the lyra-viol (see illus. 1 & 2) was donated in 1989 to Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service. It was found in Ratby, Leicestershire, and brought to the Jewry Wall Museum by one of the present authors (DR), who had received it from a fellow member of the Museums' Archaeological Fieldwork Group. It seems to be the first discovery of its type in the county.

The manuscript was found by a builder in the former main dwelling house of Church Farm, across the road south-east of Ratby church. A ball of paper was found lodged between the house wall and the eaves, close to a chimney. When opened, there were two papers, the outer an obligation dated July 1700, still in private ownership. Inside this was the present fragment of music. It is a single piece of paper, without watermarks, faded and stained, of maximum surviving dimensions 145mm by 98mm (5¾in. by 3¾in.). Two straight edges, one with a trace of stain from a binding, may indicate the page was torn out of a music pocket-book. The other two edges are damaged, and at least ¼in. is missing from the top, and 1in. from the side. Conjectural restorations of the resultant missing portions of music (by AG) are suggested in illustrations 3 & 4.

The music is handwritten, with a title 'Saraband' at the end of one piece. The formation



1. The Ratby MS as found (side 1)



2. The Ratby MS as found (side 2)

of the letters is very plain and simple, and corresponds to many mid-seventeenth century hands.¹ The four music staves on each side of the paper have the six lines normal for the tablature system of notation, common for certain stringed instruments, such as lute, viol and guitar, from the sixteenth century onwards. In this, each line represents one string of the instrument, and the positions of the player's left-hand fingers, 'stopping' the frets to produce the different notes, are indicated by the letters of the alphabet, 'a' indicating an un-stopped, 'open' string. The rhythm is shown above the staff, in modern-style notation, which replaced the earlier 'flag' system from around 1630 onwards in England.²

There seem to be two nearly-complete pieces of music, both in the same key and both in triple time. Twenty bars of one piece survive, including a repeated section (No. 1 in illustrations 3 and 4), and twelve bars of the Saraband (No. 2). This was a stately and elegant dance, which became popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and both pieces seem in fact to be simple, straightforward dance tunes. They were without doubt intended for the viol, played *lyra-way*, that is, with the melody filled out here and there with chords of two or three notes. All the chords in these pieces have notes only on adjacent strings, unlikely unless they were to be played with a bow, quill or plectrum, rather than plucked with the fingers. This factor, together with the style (for instance, the final unison-and-octave chord of the Saraband), and the 'harp-way sharp' tuning of the strings, uniquely used for *lyra viol* (see illus. 4), make it clear that the music was intended for this instrument.³ Several well-known collections of such dance tunes were published by John Playford in 1651 and later; for example, simple arrangements for the *lyra-viol* in *Musick's Recreation on the Viol, Lyra-Way* (1682). Although similar to these in character, and in the 'harp-way sharp' tuning system, the

1. Julia Craig-McFeely, personal communication

2. Martin Cummins, personal communication

3. Stewart McCoy, personal communication

1.

2.

3. The Ratby MS: transcript (editorial contributions bracketed)

two Ratby pieces do not appear there, or in Gordon Dodd's *Thematic Index of Music for Viols*.⁴ The Ratby dances thus appear to be new additions to the known music repertoire.

Recent research in the John Rylands Library of Manchester University (by DR) drew attention afresh to the Ratby manuscript, which was actually found over ten years ago, when Church Farm was being demolished. This research has produced additional musical information associated with the same farmhouse, which throws some light on possible circumstances in which the music may have been played, although many questions still remain unanswered. An account book of the Earl of Stamford for his residence at Bradgate House in Bradgate Park, Leicestershire, has passed to the John Rylands Library with the papers from the Earl's descendants' Dunham Massey, Cheshire, estates, now owned by the National Trust. The collection of ledgers and papers from the family muniments, still uncatalogued in 1988, mainly comprises documents concerning Stamford lands formerly

4. Published for the Viola da Gamba Society, 1980–87; Gordon Dodd, via Stewart McCoy, personal communication

"Harp Way Sharp" Tuning

The musical score is presented in two numbered sections, each consisting of three staves of music in bass clef. Section 1 begins with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. It features a variety of note values, including quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests. Editorial contributions are indicated by brackets around certain notes and chords. Section 2 also starts with one flat and a 3/4 time signature, continuing the melodic and harmonic development with similar notation and editorial markings. The score concludes with a final chord on the third staff of each section.

4. The Ratby MS: reconstruction in modern notation (editorial contributions bracketed)

held in the Stalybridge and Ashton-under-Lyne areas (now part of Tameside Metropolitan Borough, Manchester). One small volume, however, proved to be the Pantry and Wine Cellarer's Account Book for Bradgate House, Leicestershire, covering the years 1678 to 1682. The single volume bore no external markings to this effect (which may have some bearings on its survival), but inside the village names of Newtown, Grooby (*sic*) and Ratby were written on its first page, followed by the names of men required to complete four days' boon work during the period between 1679 and 1682. A lengthy list of small payments for services rendered followed the boons.

Amongst this list appears an entry for 12 January 1679: 'Abraham Bunney for playing on twelfe day 5s 0d'. No other payments for players are listed. Abraham Bunney (1640–1704) is known to have been from the Ratby family of five generations of that name, who were both carpenters and farmers by trade. The location of Abraham's house in Ratby can be placed by knowledge of the other farmers and their lands in the village at that time, and the fortunate

survival of a will made by Richard Lawley in 1701 leaving his 'house and land in Ratby wherein Abraham Bunney now dwells . . .'⁵ Abraham Bunney would thus have been 39 years of age at the time of playing at Bradgate House in 1679. No further documentary evidence has come to light to link him more firmly with the music fragment found in his former house, or to throw light on whether it might have been these pieces that he played at Bradgate House in 1679. If it was, interesting questions arise as to how and where he learned his skills as a viol player, and how he acquired the music.

Copies of music were avidly and widely circulated amongst amateur players in the upper classes. Thus copies of a Gibbons viol fantasy were sent by an acquaintance in London to the Prince of Orange's Secretary in the Hague in 1645.⁶ No mention is made, however, of musical instruments or sheet music in any of the wills or inventories which survive for several members and various generations of the Bunney family in Ratby. Nevertheless, every village at this time had musicians who played in church and for secular dances, and Ratby church had a minstrels' gallery from around 1630 until the 1930s. Noble houses had their own musicians, who sometimes served in other capacities, as, for example, one of the Hastings family musicians, who also acted as body servant to the Earl of Huntingdon, his master.⁷ These household musicians could have been supplemented with local players for larger occasions. Such an occasion may have been the Twelfth Day Revels alluded to in the account book. The Vigil and Feast of the Epiphany (January 5th and 6th) were known as the Twelfth Night and Twelfth Day respectively because they brought to a climax the festivities connected with the Twelve Days of Christmas. For ordinary village people this time of the year saw a relaxation in the manorial work requirements and associated restrictions. Church ceremonies and secular revelry brought with them a period of what must have felt like an almost continuous holiday, the heart and centre of which were the two great feasts, of Christ's Nativity, and of his Manifestation to the Gentiles (the Epiphany). This holiday was brought to an end on Epiphany, or Twelfth Day, with a kind of 'last fling', before work was resumed in earnest on Plough Monday. Agnes Strickland in her *Lives of the Queens of Scotland* describes a Twelfth Day feast at Holyrood in 1563 at which Mary Queen of Scots was present.⁸ At Bradgate House in 1679 Abraham Bunney was paid to help provide for the Earl of Stamford similar feasting, dancing, music and revelry, and may very well have chosen to play the very pieces of music found later on the tablature manuscript in his probable former home.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Michael Ball of Ratby for information on Church Farm and various members of the Bunney family, and for the donation of the manuscript, which has now been conserved and made available for public consultation at the Leicestershire Record Office (DE3502). The help of Alison Crum, Elizabeth Dodd and Stewart McCoy (professional performers and teachers); Julia Craig-McFeely (postgraduate student, University of Oxford); and Martin Grayson and Steve Heavens (amateur musicians) in transcribing and restoring the tablature is gratefully acknowledged. The figures were drawn by Richard Knox.

5. LRO: Groby Peculiar Probate Court, DE73/254, Will of Richard Lawley, dated 1701; Michael Ball, personal communication
6. T. Crawford, 'Constantijn Huygens and the "Engelsche Viool" ', *Chelys*, 18 (1989), p.44
7. James Knowles, personal communication
8. A. Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of Scotland*. 8 vols, Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1850–59