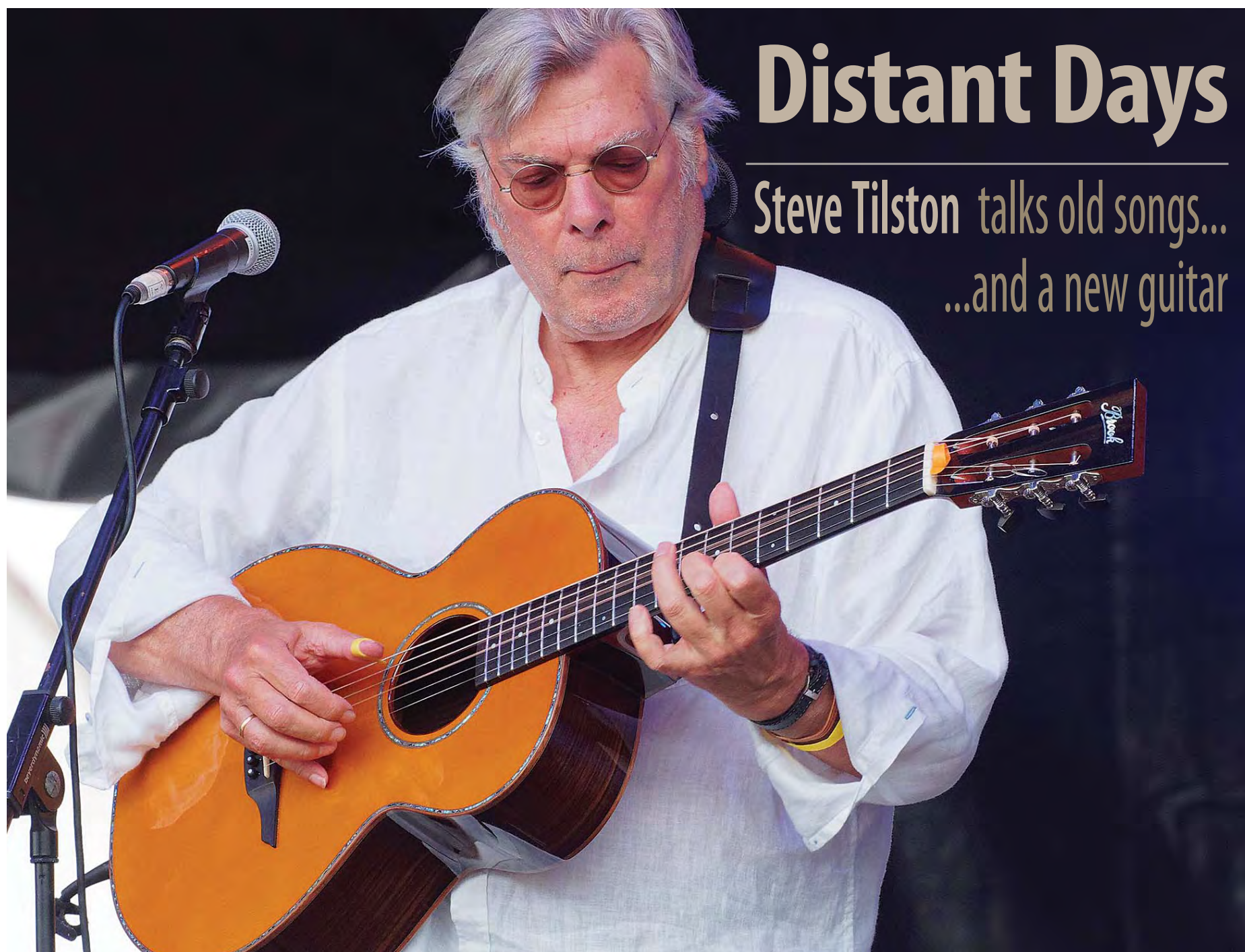


Babbling Brook



issue 6

spring 2019



Distant Days

Steve Tilston talks old songs...
...and a new guitar

Welcome...

...to the latest issue of *'Babbling Brook'*, our online magazine for all things 'Brook Guitars'.

As ever, it's been quite a while since the last edition (that's why we call the magazine 'an occasional'!) – but in the meantime it's been 'business as usual' here at Easterbrook, with builds, custom orders and repairs galore.

We'd like to think that the only word beginning with *'Br...'* in this issue (unless we're getting a touch of late wintery weather) was Brook...but unfortunately, not even *'Babbling Brook'* is free from the dreaded *'Br...'* word that seems to be on everyone's lips and in everyone's faces, whether they like it or not, at the moment...

Thankfully, however, we have managed to keep the references to *Brexit* down to an absolute minimum in our article on the CITES regulations on [page 23...](#)

Aside from luthiers, the outcome and effects of the *'Br...'* debacle is of real concern to working musicians, particularly those who tour regularly abroad – none more so than our cover story artist **Steve Tilston**. Fortunately, we managed to avoid too much political discussion in our interview with Steve – concentrating instead on his musical journey and, of course, the new guitar we built for him recently...

Steve's new *Calder* is one of an increasing range of instruments that we now offer the discerning guitarist – and on [page 24](#) we take a look at some of the additional and 'special order' guitars that have joined the roster since our early days.

Many of our guitars have, of course, found homes overseas – and our friend **George** is flying the flag (a star spangled banner in this case) for transatlantic Brook owners. We have a chat with him in the latest of our occasional (there's that word again!) *'Collectors'* features on [page 13...](#)

Well, the bottom of the page is looming fast, so we'll stop rambling on and let you get on with enjoying the rest of the magazine. And who knows – by the time the next issue comes around, that *'Br...'* word might be a thing of the past. We're not holding our *breath*...

Cheers...



Simon and Andy
Founders, Brook Guitars

In the last issue of *'Babbling Brook'*, solo acoustic guitarist **Phil Taylor** shared the experience of home recording his debut CD, *'One Year On'*, on a strict budget. Now, he's generously provided the music for one of the album's standout tracks for fellow 'Brookies' to try their hands at...



The Minack Chronicles Nature Reserve in Cornwall – inspiration for Phil Taylor's 'A Place for Solitude'.

An etude in Solitude



'A Place For Solitude' is an original piece of music inspired by *The Minack Chronicles Nature Reserve*, which is situated on the stunningly beautiful and rugged coast near Lamorna Cove in West Cornwall.

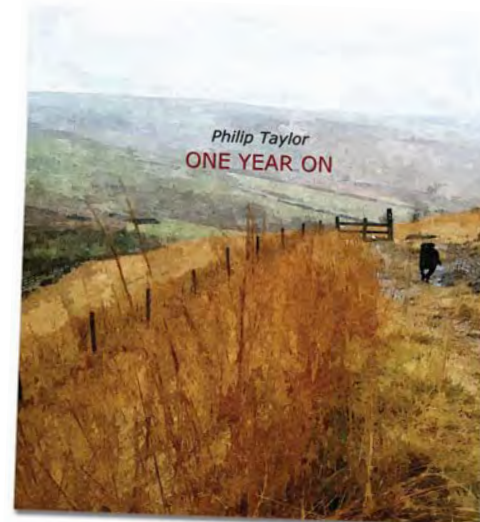
It's the former home of authors Derek and Jeannie Tangye, who we had the privilege of meeting whilst on holiday in Cornwall in 1984, and we have subsequently revisited the reserve twice in the last few years.

The tune was written over a few hours in August 2015 on my Brook *Torridge* guitar

which has Rosewood back and sides with a European Spruce top. When it came into my possession in 2010 it was my first Brook. I had not composed anything whatsoever prior to owning this guitar – which, for me, is a testament to how inspirational I find Brook guitars.

I consider *'A Place For Solitude'* to be a

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Singer-songwriter and guitarist **Steve Tilston** needs no introduction in the world of folk and contemporary acoustic music. As one of the UK's most celebrated songsmiths, he's worked with a veritable 'Who's Who' of fellow artistes in a musical journey spanning almost half a century – and even inspired a Hollywood movie! Here, he talks to *Martin Bell* about his latest career retrospective CD, Brook's re-imagining of his first-choice working guitar...and 'that letter' from John Lennon...



Photo: Shay Rowan

Distant Days

MB: When and how did you start to play music – and what/who were your earliest influences?

ST: We had a piano at home and my maternal grandmother showed me how to vamp and play 'These Foolish Things'. Elvis was my first real influence, and he was invariably pictured with an acoustic

guitar. Later, there came a whole raft of rock groups, through them to R&B, Chuck Berry and then on to folk blues.

MB: Did your guitar playing and songwriting

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“
I don't think I was ever part of the 'English Tradition'. I'd like to think that music is not constrained by national boundaries, and that mine is a complete musical melange...

”

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develop in tandem – or was one the product of the other?

ST: Always in tandem, right from the offset; before I had a guitar, I was always making up tunes on the piano. My early songwriting was usually the product of a 'happy accident' whilst trying to learn something else.

MB: When did you begin playing live? Very early on, for instance, you were one half of a duo with Dave Evans...

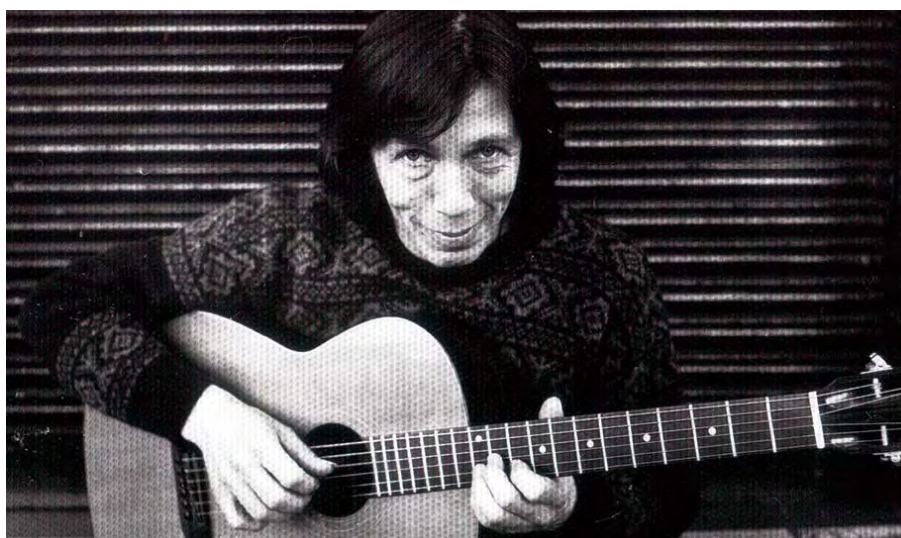
ST: I started doing floor spots in folk clubs at the age of 15 and had my first paying gig supporting a man called Malcolm Price at a club in Northampton when I was 16.

I left home at 18 and moved to a spare room in Dave Evans' flat in Loughborough. I'd written a handful of songs before, but in that environment the songs just seemed to pour out of me. I still fondly remember sitting in that kitchen with Dave, just playing and playing and, of course, learning. Dave was 10 years older than me and had a wealth of knowledge that I just soaked up. At that time, Dave wasn't writing songs and when we started doing duo gigs, his role was mostly as lead guitar – pretty much as appeared on my debut album.

MB: And along the way, even then, you were rubbing shoulders with some of the greats of the English music scene – Wizz Jones, Ralph McTell, Clive Palmer – some of whom were (no pun intended) 'instrumental' in influencing your career path...



(Above) The legendary Wizz Jones and his beloved old Epiphone Texan, pictured at Norwich Folk Festival in the late Seventies.



ST: Dave and I entered a folk competition at Nottingham Playhouse, in which we came last! Wizz was somehow in the audience, introduced himself and said that we should have won! He would have been about 30 then, but already a legend. He was very encouraging and gave us his address in London, with the invitation to look him up sometime. I still treasure the look of horror on his face when I actually pitched up on his doorstep the very next week! He was great, though, and – true to his word – gave me a great entrée to some of the key London clubs, particularly Les Cousins. It was also through Wizz that I met Ralph, Clive, Bert et al.

MB: A debut album – 'An Acoustic Confusion' – at the age of 20 is no mean feat! What are your strongest recollections of that time/experience?

ST: Well, again, Wizz and Ralph were instrumental in getting me an introduction to Ian Anderson and Village Thing Records. After a gig at the Bristol Troubadour Ian announced to the audience that I would be the next Village Thing recording artist. Of course, I was knocked out!

We commenced recording late 1970, everything was performed live, both solo and ensemble down onto a Revox machine. It was done in the wilds of Gloucestershire, in a freezing farmhouse with me wearing my grandmother's fur coat. But really, I just accepted it and was overjoyed to be putting something down.

MB: The guitar playing and arrangements on that album show a level of maturity and

(Left) British fingerstyle guitarist/singer-songwriter/luthier Dave Evans.

(Below, from top) The front cover, original vinyl LP label and CD re-issue booklet to Steve's 1971 debut album, 'An Acoustic Confusion' on The Village Thing label.



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Distant Days

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sophistication well beyond your relatively tender years back then...

ST: Thank you. Again, I just accepted that there was a certain standard that had to be attained. There were a lot of great finger-picking players around who, like me, ate, slept and breathed guitars and music. And of course, there was a lot of competition.

MB: And the album had at least one famous fan – Rod Stewart (below), for instance...



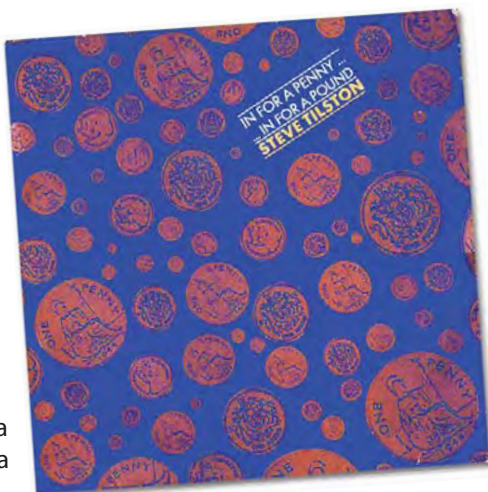
ST: It was the Daily Mail, of all papers, that gave me a glowing review. Rod Stewart's album was also being reviewed in the same edition and the music journalist Mike Cable – knowing that Rod was into acoustic music – played him my album. Apparently, he loved it and ordered a boxfull to give to his mates!

MB: More of the present day later (!)...but you've come literally full circle by re-working three songs from 'An Acoustic Confusion' on your latest offering, 'Distant Days'.

ST: Well, it was inevitable that I would include songs from my first album, given that it is a retrospective and being my earlier songs, they are quite special to me.

MB: Your acoustic beginnings gave way to raucous rock music a few years later – with 'In For A Penny – In For A Pound'. Tell us a little about that period in your life...

ST: I had a second go at living in London in '79 and secured a publishing deal that paid me a retainer to attempt to write



After one gig, we cranked the music up so loud that my ears were still ringing two days later. It was then that I thought that maybe the acoustic guitar was beckoning me back again...

songs of a more 'commercial bent'. I wasn't very good at it and ached to return to Bristol. At that time the British folk scene had pretty much polarised into two camps: traditional and comedians, with the contemporary folk musicians, all but getting squeezed out. So, for a couple of years, I pretty much didn't enter a folk club and instead formed a rock band called Loose Shoes and just did the rounds of a handful of London clubs – and I actually really enjoyed it, especially when people danced!

MB: But then your Wikipedia page explains that you 'soon reverted to quieter music' afterwards!

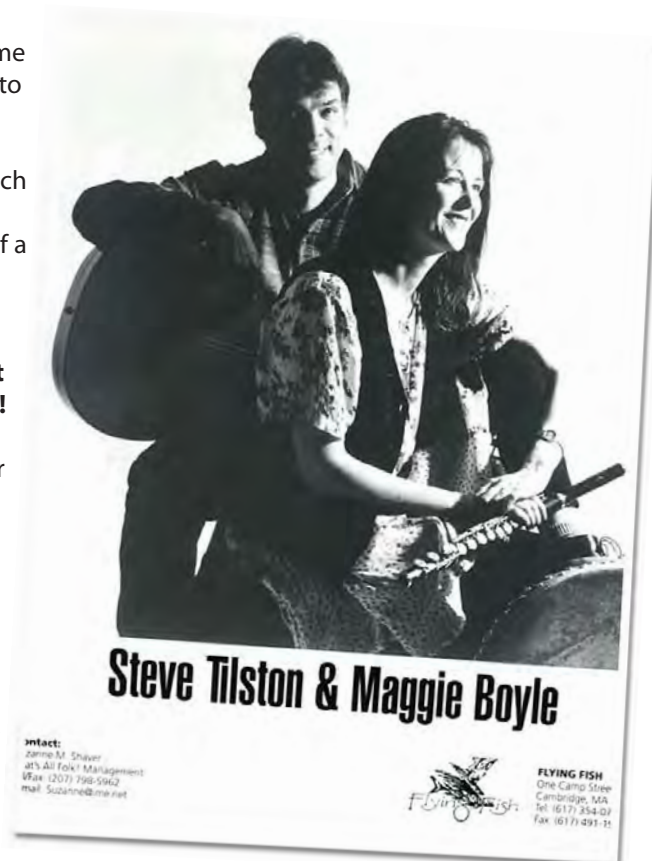
ST: When I moved back to Bristol, I formed another band and we became very popular doing the rounds. After one gig at The Bristol Bridge Inn, we cranked the music up so loud that my ears were still ringing two days later. It was then that I thought that maybe the acoustic guitar was beckoning me back again. Also, by then, I was married to Maggie Boyle and was getting re-acquainted with traditional music.

MB: Tell us something about your time in the on-stage band with Ballet Rambert – how did that come about?

ST: Maggie knew all the people on the London Irish scene, in particular Mike Taylor, who was a member of the Ballet Rambert musicians and, through them, a founder member of the group Incantation. The choreographer, Christopher Bruce, was interested in creating a ballet built predominantly around



(Left and below) 1990s publicity shots of Steve and his then wife, the late Maggie Boyle, with whom he recorded two albums – 'Of Moor And Mesa' (1992) and 'All Under The Sun' (1996). Both had also previously been members of John Renbourn's short-lived group Ship Of Fools.



Irish music and Mike suggested songs and musicians to play them both live and onstage with the dancers. It was the forerunner of 'Riverdance', became a hit and we toured all over Europe and the Middle East. I think it lasted for about four years. Through that ballet, I got involved in a flamenco one called 'Entre Dos Aguas' and I was forced onto a musical learning curve that was ultimately very rewarding...but not particularly good on the fingernails!

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MB: You then went on to form your own record label – *Run River* – and became a member of John Renbourn's group, *Ship of Fools*...

ST: John came to a gig that Maggie and I were doing in Exeter and after the gig, we played a few things round his kitchen table and John suggested we should form a band and go and tour America – which is basically what we did, along with old jazzier Tony Roberts.

MB: Around about that time (late 1980s) was intrigued by a photograph I saw in (what turned out to be the last issue of) *Frets* magazine of you playing an instrument called an arpeggione. It's not an instrument that we tend to hear a lot about – but one which, nonetheless, would probably be of immediate interest to guitarists...

ST: It's a bowed guitar, that was invented in Austria in the early 19th century by a man called Stauffer – who was, incidentally, CF Martin's boss before he emigrated to the States. The only piece of music for it in existence was written by Schubert (a keen guitar player to boot) and is a really lovely piece. However, the instrument didn't catch on.

I saw a photograph of one in Grove's book (*The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* - Ed.), became obsessed and wrote to the museum of what was then West Berlin. Amazingly, they had the plans and very kindly sent me a copy; I got (Bristol luthier) Jonny Kinkade interested and he built what was the first one for over 100 years. It's a lovely



(Left) Steve with his custom-made arpeggione – a six-stringed, fretted hybrid between a guitar and a cello.

When I've written a new melody on guitar, I'll then play it on the arpeggione and, being a bowed instrument, it gives me a greater insight into whether it's a good one or not...

instrument. There are now lots of them and there's even an arpeggione society in Japan. I wrote a piece for a Belgian player called Nicholas De La Telle, who is a virtuoso on the instrument.

MB: Do you still play/practise the arpeggione?

ST: Yes, from time to time I get it down and when I've written a new melody on guitar, I'll then play it on the arpeggione and, being a bowed instrument, it gives me a greater insight into whether it's a good one or not. I did play it a few times accompanying Maggie Boyle, but to get really good at it, I'd have to divert time from my first love the guitar.

MB: What about guitar? Do you have a daily practise regime – do you need to maintain your instrumental 'chops', for instance?

ST: I don't have a practice regime as such, but it appears to work out as 'a little and often'! If I'm writing a new piece then I get immersed and hours just slip by. I have noticed that if I don't play for a day or two, my finger pads soon let me know about it – must be an age thing.

MB: How do you define/categorise your own playing style?

ST: It's hard for me to say as so many different influences have crept in, both by accident and design. I still like the term 'folk baroque' – that seems to encompass a lot of different styles.

MB: Do you think your guitar style comes predominantly comes from the English or American tradition?

ST: Again, hard for me to say, but I'd guess that the American tradition is very strong. I don't think I was ever part of the 'English tradition'; I'd like to think that music is not restrained by national boundaries and that mine is a complete musical melange.

MB: Do you use many tunings? What decides your use of an alternate tuning – and are there any specific/ unusual ones you'd like to share?

ST: Getting back to sitting round the kitchen table



The eponymous album by John Renbourn's *Ship of Fools*, featuring Steve (bottom right) and fellow crew members John Renbourn, Maggie Boyle and Tony Roberts.

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Distant Days

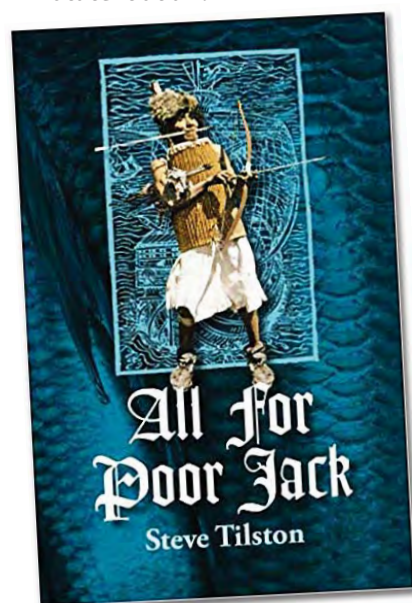
from page 6

with Dave Evans way back in the late 60s, we came up with some strange examples, thinking it was all very cutting edge and unique– only to find that, years later, there were a lot of the same ‘kitchen table tunings’ being devised all over the place! Dave went on to make some of them his own, and initially I’d use quite a number in live situations. But of course, this was all before the advent of portable tuners, and it was not very audience-friendly, so ultimately I settled on conventional tuning, dropped and double dropped D and, of course, DADGAD. Although, having said that, one I like and have used now and again is CGDGBE.

MB: Can you describe the ‘creative process’? Words or music first, for example? Where do you look for inspiration – and do you apply any formal music theory to the art of composition, or simply ‘go with the flow’ and trust your ears?

ST: It happens every which way you could imagine, but mostly it’s through making happy mistakes on the guitar. I like it when I get a melody with a lyrical phrase away from the instrument; usually, this happens when I’m driving or walking on the moors. I used to work on the premise that if it’s good I’ll remember it, but sadly it doesn’t really work like that!

MB: Do you write your music down on paper or notate it at all?



ST: Sometimes, I’ll write the top line down and with an instrumental piece I’ll jot down quite a bit more. I went through a period where I would write a lot of stuff down, but now I try to keep my mind on the ball with memorising stuff. You could say I’ve come full circle...

MB: There has been a strong political and, in particular, passionate environmentalist thread running through your work – how do you feel about the current state of the world in general?



(Above) Steve pictured after a recent gig in the Staffordshire Moorlands with his custom Brook Calder; (left) the cover of his debut historical novel, ‘All for Poor Jack’.

ST: Don’t get me started! I’m appalled by so much stuff that’s happening, not least b***shit. I think I’ll go and have a lie down in a darkened room. No, on second thoughts, I’ll play my wonderful new Brook guitar...

MB: They say we all potentially have a novel inside us, Steve – and in your case, it was ‘All for

Poor Jack; tell us about that – and whether you plan to continue treading the literary path.

ST: It was something I’d promised myself to do, just like somebody else might decide on running the marathon. I’ve always been interested in history and

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in particular the discovery of the so called 'New World', and when I lived in Bristol I heard about the real possibility of there having been Bristol cod fishermen fishing off Newfoundland a good few years before Columbus sailed. I used that as a backdrop to my story. I've got ideas for another novel, it's just finding the time to set aside – once started it tends to take over all else.

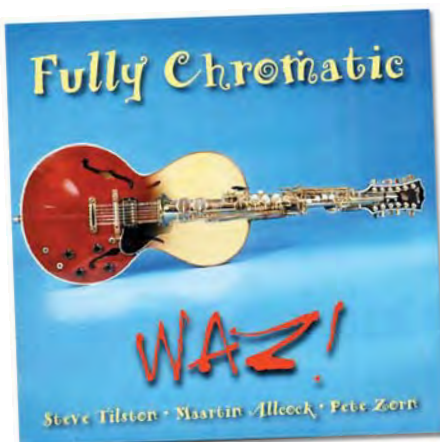
MB: One of your most recent collaborations was 2016's 'The Janus Game' with Jez Lowe; are there any musicians (living or dead!) who you would still like to work with/have worked with?

ST: Can't really think of any – I got to play with a lot of the people I venerated. I would have loved to have seen Big Bill Broonzy. Maybe it would be good to write another song with my old pal Chris Smither. Who knows? I really enjoyed the whole writing and recording process with Jez.



Steve collaborated with Jez Lowe on 2016's 'The Janus Game'.

MB: Life never stands still, does it – and so many people are still coming to terms with the sad death of your old WAZ! bandmate Maartin Allcock last year...



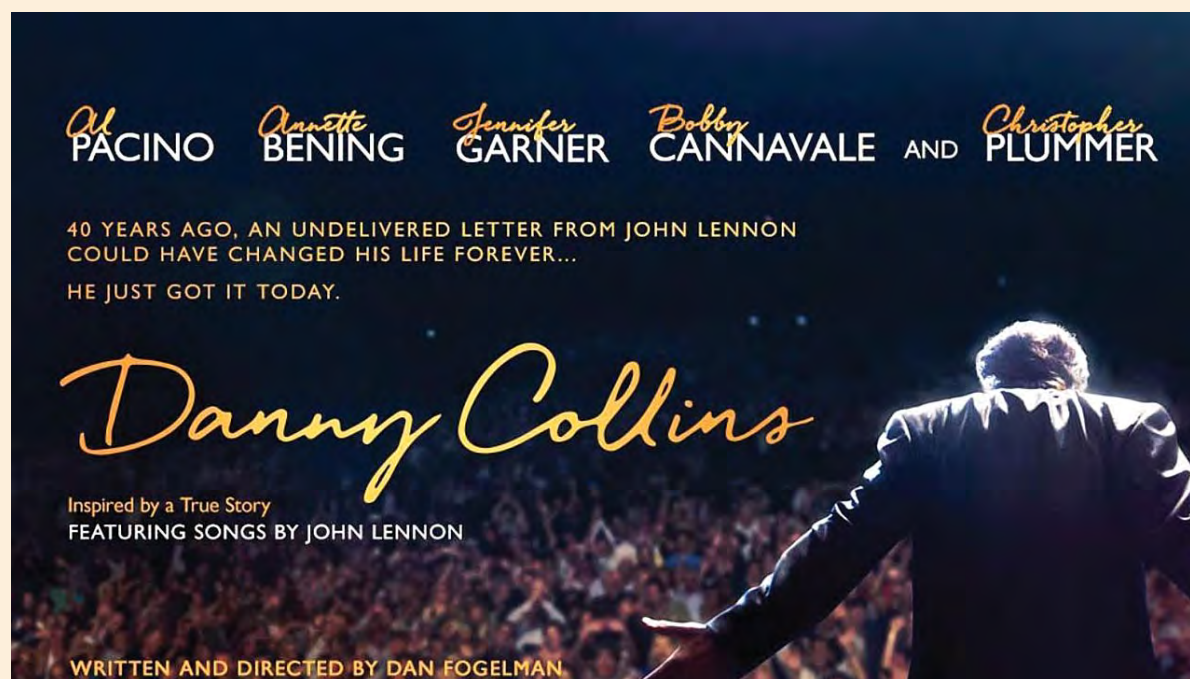
ST: Glad to have made some good noises with Maart. He was a monster player on so many instruments.

MB: Looking to the 'next generation'

of musicians, how

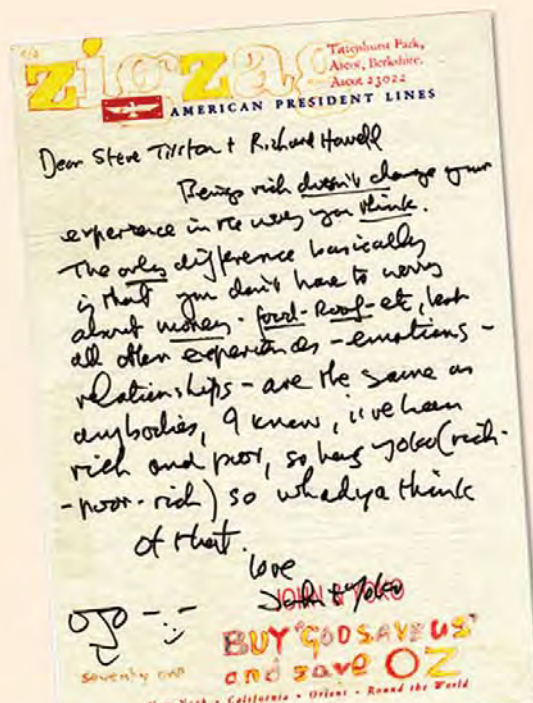
are (daughter) Martha and (son) Joe's musical

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Dear Steve... Love John and Yoko

Fans of Steve Tilston will have listened to the CDs, read the book – and seen the film... But for those unfamiliar (and there can't be many!) with the story, the 2015 Hollywood film 'Danny Collins' represented a fairly recent 'chapter' in Steve's life – beginning with a 38-year-old letter that was never delivered...



IN August 2010, it was reported that John Lennon had penned a letter of support to Steve in 1971, though it was never reached him.

Lennon had been inspired to write to the then 21-year-old folk singer after reading an interview in *ZigZag* magazine in which Steve admitted he feared that wealth and fame might negatively affect his songwriting.

But Steve remained blissfully unaware of the letter's existence until 2005, when a collector contacted him to verify its authenticity.

"Being rich doesn't change your experience in the way you think," Lennon wrote. It was signed "Love John and Yoko".

This letter became the inspiration behind the 2015 film 'Danny Collins', which starred Al Pacino in the title role.

ST: Whoever purloined the letter and sold it to a collector in America – and I have a good idea who it was! – did me a favour in many ways. Okay, so I didn't get to meet Lennon, but I met Al Pacino instead (see left), a film was made – and, best of all, I was paid!

MB: And HAS wealth and fame negatively affected your songwriting at all?

ST: How would I know!?



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careers doing? What do you think of the work they're both doing – and are there any collaborations with either of them planned?

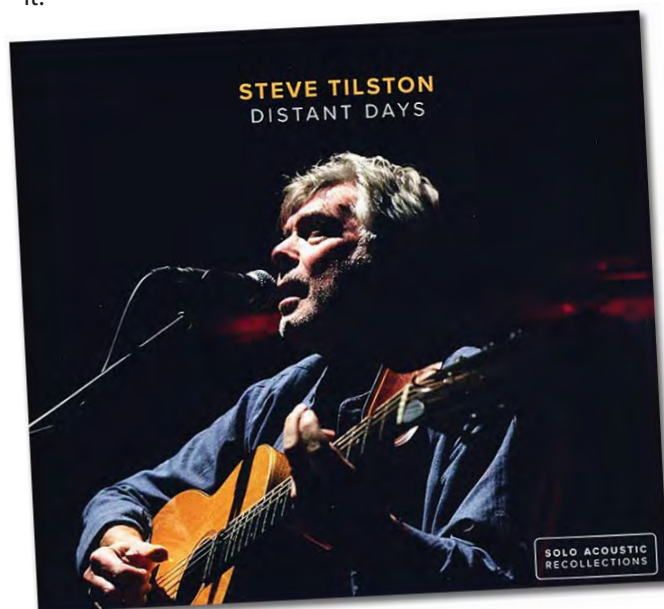
ST: Martha is still writing good stuff and getting involved with film-making. After working for the Red Cross, Joe has semi-reactivated his band Random Hand and he's writing some great new acoustic songs, too.

MB: Do you find/have the time to listen to music in your spare time? If so, who/what do you listen to/enjoy?

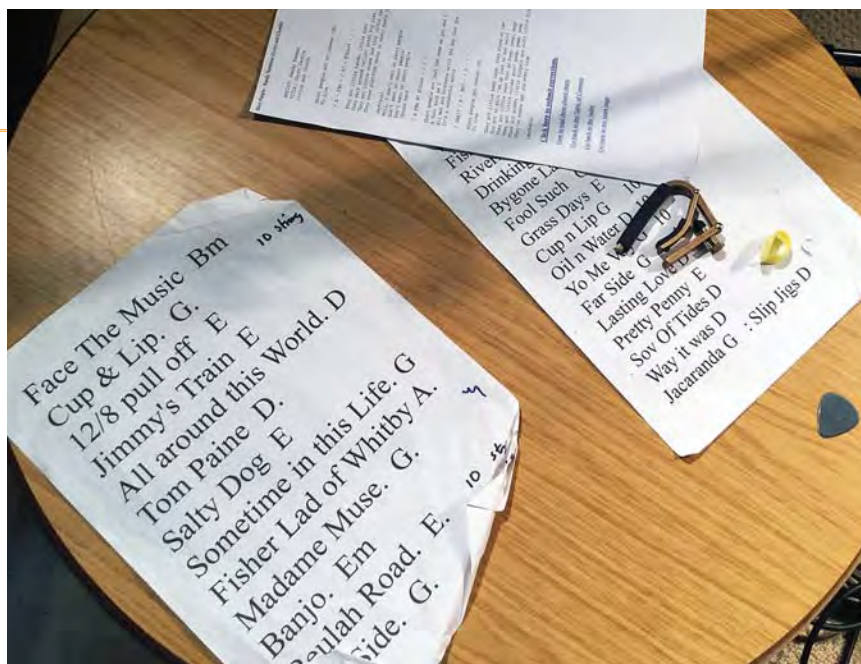
ST: I do most of my listening in the car whilst travelling to and from gigs. Quite often classical, jazz. Not much guitar music, although Phil Henry gave me a copy of his new solo album and there's some exquisite slide playing therein.

MB: Bringing things right up to date – and with such a wide and varied back catalogue – how difficult was it choosing the music on your latest solo acoustic retrospective, 'Distant Days'?

ST: I recorded a whole raft of songs, quite a bit of it taken from suggestions by friends, both real and virtual ie via Facebook. As it is, there's the maximum amount of music possible on the record – and there were still quite a number of songs that didn't make it.



(Above) Steve's latest CD, 'Distant Days' – a 19-track retrospective featuring solo reworkings of some of his finest songs.



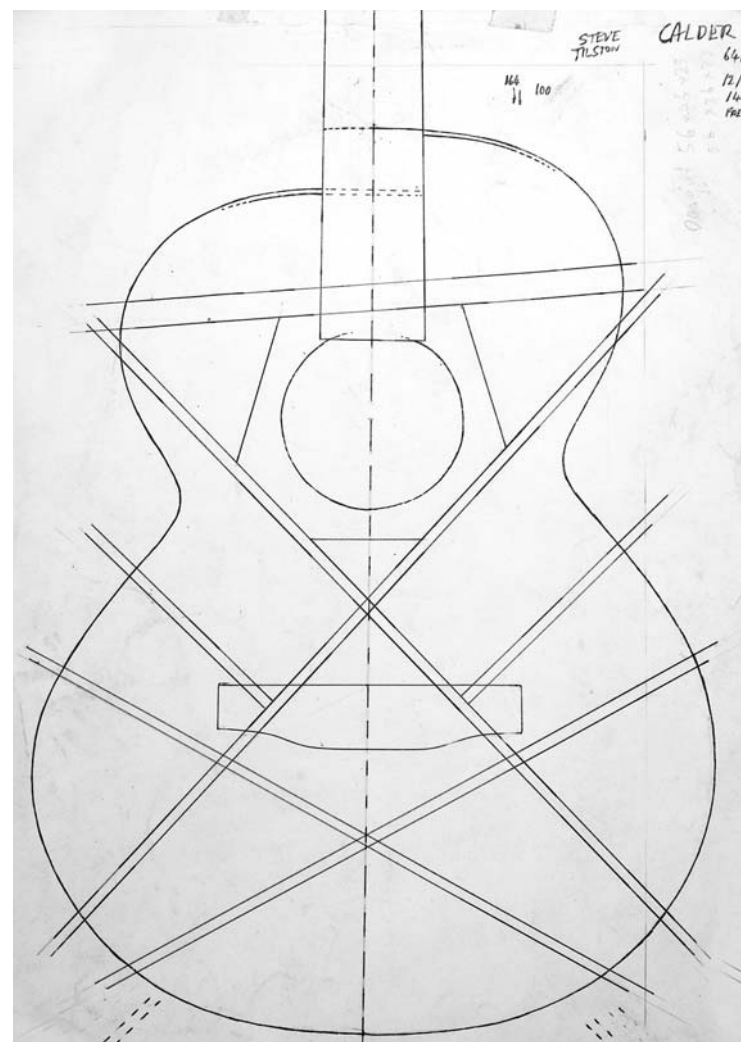
MB: How did it feel to be re-recording music going back – in some cases – 40-odd years? Any challenges involved...and have the performances changed over the years?

ST: Mixed feelings really; some brought back fond memories, and others bitter-sweet. Given that my voice has changed quite considerably over the years, certain songs necessitated a change of key and, invariably, that wasn't just a case of taking off a capo, but involved a whole new arrangement. It was both challenging and enjoyable.

MB: Unfortunately, your new custom Brook Calder model was ready too late to make an appearance on the recording – but how is it settling in now?

ST: That was a real shame as the Brook is going from strength to strength and seems to improve every time I pick it up. The old faithful 12/14 (a 12 frets to the body guitar, but with 14 frets access on the treble side, thanks to a modified lower bout design) that my old school friend Martin Cole made me is still a lovely instrument, but I just fancied a change and I've had my eye on owning a Brook for quite some time.

Given that my voice has changed quite considerably over the years, certain songs necessitated a change of key and, invariably, that wasn't just a case of taking off a capo, but involved a whole new arrangement...



(Above) The workshop plans for Steve's custom Brook Calder. Note the double cross brace to make the top more stable and adaptable to changes in humidity while he's travelling around gigging. Although the guitar uses the '12/14' idea from Steve's original Martin Cole instruments, the Calder is a completely different shape.

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(Left, from top): From initial drawings to mould, Steve's custom *Calder* gradually begins to take shape...

I came up with the off-set 12/14 idea... 12 frets to the body guitars seem to have a special 'something', because it sets the bridge in the centre of the guitar's body mass and everything's vibrating to the max...

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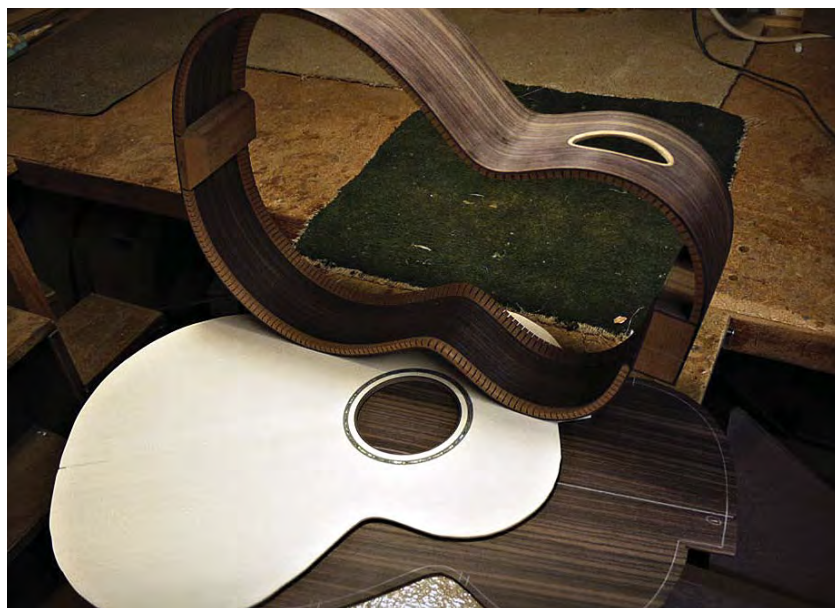
MB: How/where did you first discover Brook Guitars?

ST: I can't honestly remember, but I do know that I was very impressed. I've seen a lot of them now and I've never come across a bad one.

MB: The *Calder* is based very closely on your faithful old Martin Cole guitar, which you had a big hand in helping to design, didn't you?

ST: Yes, I came up with the off-set 12/14 idea, when it became apparent that, on the whole, 12 frets to the body guitars seem to have a special 'something' to them; from what I understand, it's because it sets the bridge in the centre of the main guitar's body mass and everything's vibrating to the max. However, the downside is that it's harder going up 'the dusty end' – hence the compromise. Obviously, I could have gone for a full cutaway, but I just don't like cutaways visually.

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(Above) Steve checks out the progress of his *Calder* at the Easterbrook workshop.



Distant Days

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MB: How did the Brook commission come about? And what of your Cole now? Is it taking a well-earned rest from the road?

ST: I bought a *Tamar* from a friend and it was lovely, but the fretboard was a bit too narrow for me, so I passed it onto another friend and Simon and Andy offered to make me a new one with my specifications – hence the 12/14. I spoke to Martin and he had no objections about us using our joint concept.

MB: What was your design brief to Andy and Si? Is the *Calder* pretty much a measure-for-measure replica – or did you ask for any updated features/modifications?

ST: It's quite a bit different from the Cole; it's a smaller-bodied instrument for a start. I also wanted a sound portal in the top bout (see below). Last year, I was working in Belgium and I was taken to see a local luthier and every one of his guitars had this feature. The jury's out as to whether it affects the volume coming out of the front, but it certainly allows the player to get a good idea of what the guitar really sounds like. I'm working on the premise that I've paid for it, so I want to hear it!

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(Above and right) Custom features of Steve's *Calder*: (top) the shorter lower bout allows clear access to the 14th fret...and beyond; (bottom right) the upper bout soundport.



(Above) Our by-now obligatory 'through the soundport' view of the inside of Steve's new guitar.





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MB: Finally, Steve, would you care to give us your thoughts on your *Calder* and Brook guitars in general?

ST: All I can add to what has already been said, which is that the standard of craftsmanship is astoundingly good – as good as the best anywhere. Also they're a brace of super blokes...

www.stevetilston.com



Imitation – the sincerest form of *luthiery*..?

ALTHOUGH Steve Tilston's custom *Calder* was originally a 'one-off' special order, it wasn't long before it had captured the imaginations of other customers, too – with the result that we're now working on TWO more similar guitars for musician and broadcaster **Keith Warmington** and Brook collector extraordinaire **Tony Kerry**, as they explain here...



*As a mainstay of the BBC Radio Bristol team since 1983, Cornishman **Keith Warmington** is as well-known for his vocal talents as he is for his superb harmonica-playing, which has seen him performing with Andy Fairweather-Low, Al Perkins and – regularly – alongside Steve...*

Steve is one of my oldest friends and I'm probably more well known as a harmonica player than a guitarist. I met him in 1971, played on his first album ('*An Acoustic Confusion*') and we've been mates ever since.

Naturally, when he said he was getting a new guitar I was very interested and intrigued, particularly as Steve doesn't tend to change very often. Then, he started sending me pictures of it being made, and I thought 'Wow!'

Then, we were playing a gig somewhere and he came in with the new Brook, got it out, handed it over, and I thought 'Oh, God!' and immediately fell in love with it. Within a week, I was on the telephone to Simon and Andy...

My wife Suzy and I went down to the workshop to choose the wood and spec it all out. It's not going to be exactly like Steve's; for a start, it will have a solid headstock, because I'm not keen on the slotted style with the open tuners.

And, because I'm a Cornishman, I wanted something Cornish as an inlay in the headstock – I'm going for a Cornish chough, which is largely black, so I believe Jack is going to do something on a subtle white background, to make it really stand out. I'm also having a natural spruce top, rather than tinted, as Steve's is.

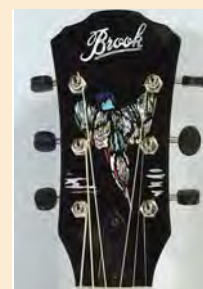
It's probably going to be the last guitar I'll ever buy (my wife laughs when I say that!), but it will be very special – I've seen many other Brooks, and they've all been lovely.

Steve absolutely loves his; every time I see him, it's come on a bit more; it's interesting to pick it up and see how it's all opening up beautifully.

I'll definitely be using mine for playing live, rather than it being an 'at home' guitar. In fact, I think it will probably be the perfect accompaniment instrument for the music I play regularly with

singer-songwriter Kate Dimpleby.

I love the place (Easterbrook), their whole ethos of building guitars, and the fact that they have invented their own machines for certain tasks!



Tony Kerry is no stranger to regular visitors to our website 'News' section, and he and his ever-growing collection of Brooks featured in issue 4 of 'Babbling Brook'...

I liked the video I saw of Steve playing his and a *Calder* was a 'must have' for me. So, as you can see, I'm still very much a Brook Acquisition Syndrome (BAS) sufferer!

The *Calder* is an interesting and fascinating guitar and I particularly liked the 12/14 fret design. I love 12-fret guitars and the design and size just appealed to my tastes. My *Calder* will have a flat, solid headstock, Swiss spruce top and walnut back and sides, in contrast to Steve's choice of Indian rosewood. I will also be having my traditional Kingfisher inlay on the headstock...



The Collectors



In previous issues of 'Babbling Brook', we have featured hapless 'sufferers' of BAS (*Brook Acquisition Syndrome*), a relatively new variant strain of the wider-recognised GAS (*Guitar Acquisition Syndrome*).

Now, it seems that the epidemic has spread further afield and has no longer been able to be contained to the shores of the British Isles...

George is – to the best of our knowledge – the first collector of Brook Guitars over in the United States, a country not exactly unknown for its luthiery and production of fine steel-stringed instruments.

We first introduced him to fellow 'Brookies' in the 'News' section of our website back in November 2018, when he was pictured (*right*) with his guitars at home in the rural suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia.

Here, in the latest of our occasional 'Collectors' feature, he chats to *Martin Bell* about 'guitar accumulation', the joys of English tonewoods – and how he's rescued 'orphaned' Brooks stranded a long way from home...



Brook guitars collector George, pictured outside his home in Peachtree Corners, Atlanta, with his collection. Second from the left is his latest acquisition – a *Taw* made of yew from the Haldon Grange estate near Exeter.

Acquisition and accumulation

MB: First of all, George, tell us a bit about yourself, where you're based and what you do for a living.

G: I'm from Nebraska and I live in Atlanta by way of Florida! I'm an engineer, working for a really, really large 'phone company (but I still have fun!). Atlanta is a great town in a good location in the Southeast. The college radio stations here are terrific.

MB: How long have you been playing the guitar?

G: A long time! I figured out guitar in college and got started there. I don't gig, this is all hobby stuff. I used to do home recording, but writing and recording multi-track stuff required more time than I had available, so I phased out of that and later focused on solo fingerpicking about the time my wife, Denise, got me my first really decent guitar.

My exposure to that type of playing starts with 'Embryonic Journey' (Jorma Kaukonen) and 'Angie' (Davy Graham) and then the 'Leo Kottke/Peter Lang/John Fahey' album and Leo Kottke's '6 & 12 String Guitar' LP, which really appealed to me. My fingerstyle CDs today still reflect that kind of playing. The Celtic/DADGAD, bluegrass, and the Windham

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Hill stuff didn't strike me as something I wanted to play. Most of the songs I initially worked up by ear and from tab were from those three players. Then, after a while, I got back to making things up and taking liberties with other people's songs. I don't write things down, it stays in my head if I keep playing it.

MB: What was your first 'decent' guitar?

G: My wife, Denise, got me an Martin OM-28V. I had a '70s Guild G-37 for years before that. It's still my favorite guitar, though it's been getting less play time since the Brooks moved in.

MB: When did you first start collecting guitars? Before discovering Brook – or as a result of?

G: I have a book on old Regals by a guy who refers to himself as a 'Guitar Accumulator'. I teeter on the edge of that; I've had multiple guitars, basses, etc. of one kind or another, for different sounds.

MB: How did you first encounter Brook Guitars?

G: It started with Danish guitarist called Finn Olafsson – but not because he plays a Brook... I like to watch YouTube with good audio and I'm interested in hearing all kinds of

acoustic guitars. I've listened to a lot of guitars this way.

Along the way, I ran across this guy playing these fantastic Martins with steel fingerpicks. He had a collection of 12 songs on different guitars, so I had to watch those. That was Finn Olafsson and the 'Video Of The Month' series he did in 2014. I like how he plays and I like his guitars, particularly this maple Ole Kehlet Folk Vintage. It has a clear, clean, musical, reverby sound that was very appealing to me and

If a Brook guitar was wine, it would be steel or concrete-fermented, and would never see oak. And the website had lots of pictures of tiny guitars being held by happy people...

was different from what I already had and what I'd been hearing. So, that then became the kind of sound I was looking for on YouTube.

I listened to a lot of European/English/Irish guitars, chasing that sound because they were closer to it than the North American guitars I was listening to. Somewhere along the way, I ended up on the Shoreline YouTube page and that's where I first heard a Brook. That was April 2016. After that, I listened to Phil Taylor's videos; Dave Thorpe's version of Bob Dylan's 'Buckets of Rain' (played on his Brook



Buckets of Rain - Dave Thorpe

118 views



BrookGuitars.com
Published on 25 Aug 2014

Dave playing the Dylan classic 'Buckets of Rain' on his Brook Clyst.

For more information about Brook Guitars please visit the website at
SHOW MORE



Danish fingerstyle guitarist and composer Finn Olafsson, whose playing defined the 'clear, clean, musical, reverby sound' George began looking for in a guitar.

Clyst - <https://youtu.be/qSmosiWWB4I>); Neik over at The Fellowship of Acoustics; RobbieJ (*our very own Robbie Jessep - Ed.*), and others. I continued checking out other guitars – but I kept going back to listen to Brooks.

MB: What were your first impressions of their instruments?

G: That they had a very clear, reverby, sound. It sounded very musical and articulate to me. If a Brook guitar was wine, it would be steel or concrete-fermented and would never see oak. And there was something different about the website, too... they had lots of tiny pictures of guitars being held by happy people.

MB: Was your first Brook an 'off the shelf' or custom build?

G: It was a custom build. I was turning 60 and wanted something for my birthday. I had already figured out that I wanted to get a small body 12-fret guitar. At first, I thought I'd get a guitar from 1957 but I wasn't happy with my options. I had heard a Martin cherry OM and I was interested in a cherry guitar. At that time, a Brook was the guitar I was really interested in, so I ended up ordering a cherry **Lyn** with a slightly wider nut and bridge than normal, to match up with the string spacing on my OM-28V. I hadn't yet played a Brook, but Simon and Andy are great fun to work with, and it was very easy.

MB: Can you tell us how the (ongoing?) GAS (Guitar Acquisition Syndrome) – or perhaps that

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(Above) Dave Thorpe performs Dylan's 'Buckets of Rain' on his Brook Clyst, on the Brook Guitars YouTube channel.



Acquisition and accumulation

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should be BAS! – began?

G: The cherry *Lyn* showed up and it really was a fine, fine, guitar. What happened after that was a flurry of Reverb Feed and the Gbase Gear Radar activity. I couldn't believe that I could get guitars of this quality at the prices they were asking. I fully intended on buying another new one from Simon and Andy, and I felt bad buying these used guitars instead – but these Brooks had been orphaned in the States, and needed a good home!

MB: What Brook instruments have you acquired since your first?

G: This was all over the course of a year or so. I had the cherry *Lyn* and then this rosewood *Lyn* popped up on my Reverb Feed that was just a few months older than my *Lyn* at a good price. It is a great little guitar (and very different from my first *Lyn*).

I was content with the twin *Lyns*. But then I started to wonder how a 14-fret Brook with a longer scale would be and I had maple in mind when (and this is true!) my Gbase Gear Radar went off, and there was this 2002 maple *Tamar* for a really low price. It was another great guitar with that clean, musical Brook tone, an intriguing low end and, again, I had a hard time putting it down.

I figured I was done now. Then, this yew *Taw* from 2013 showed up on my Reverb Feed. The price wasn't as low as the *Tamar* and I thought yew would be too mid-rangey, so I tried to ignore it. But I didn't. I did more research and read what other people said about that very same guitar on some forums.

You know how Andy and Simon like to share stories about making a guitar from a tree that fell in the woods nearby? Well, the yew was from a tree they hauled from Haldon Grange near Exeter, Devon. That put me over the top, so I sold something and got the yew *Taw*.

I think it's the biggest surprise of any of them, I had yew figured all wrong. It's a distinctive tone that reminds me of that Kehlet Vintage Folk that got me interested in that style of guitar in the first place.



I fully intended buying another new one from Simon and Andy – but these Brooks had been orphaned in the States, and needed a good home...

(Above) George's first Brook, a 12-fret custom order *Lyn*, with cherry back/sides and a spruce top, featuring a slightly wider nut and bridge, to match the string spacing on his Martin OM-28V.

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MB: Does your Brook collection have a certain 'direction' to it (eg do you aspire to owning one of every model etc)?

G: My collecting is guided by what I think would be an interesting tone that doesn't overlap with something I already have. Specific to the Brooks, it's the same basic rule; I really do like the way the Brooks do what they do and the fact that their tone doesn't overlap with other guitars I have, so there are still openings here.

MB: Are your Brooks 'working instruments'? Do you play 'live' regularly and are they the sort of guitars you happily take out of the house (running the risk that someone, somewhere may ask to try them out!)?

G: My guitars live in the basement, on the wall, and get played regularly. It's like having the best music store in town. I don't play enough but I do play a lot. I like playing solo.

MB: Do you collect other instruments/guitars, or is your collecting confined to Brooks? Can you give us an overview of the rest of your collection, if it extends beyond the Brooks?

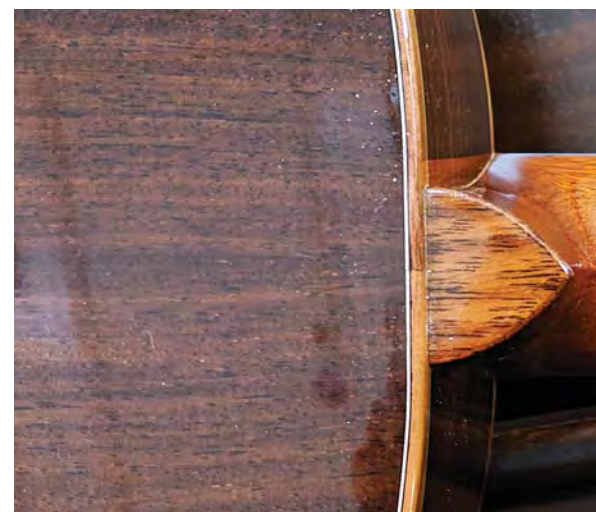
G: I thought (Leo Kottke's) 'Busted Bicycle' needed a loud, piano 12-string so I got a Martin J12-40 from this old cowboy singer. I like 12-strings and that led to a Taylor LKSM, a Gibson B45-12, and an old Bozo dreadnought 12.

I like the sound of Fahey's Recording King and D-35s. I thought I'd have more fun playing 'Sunflower River Blues' and 'Beverly' on a Dreadnought instead of an OM, so I got a Martin Marquis D-28 and then a Bozo six-string. Fahey's Weissenborn sound was the reason I got a old Martin 0-18K for slide.

My sons, Nick and Brian, bought me a Guitarras Falcón nylon string guitar from Peru that's made with local mahogany and pine; it's a very nice guitar that I really enjoy.

Then, in the middle of the Brook binge, I ran into a 1957 Levin 113 nylon-string that was made from European maple and spruce. It has that clear European tone, and it was made the year I was born, so I was compelled to get it to finish off the 60th birthday guitar accumulation!

I also have a small '30s all-birch Regal parlor guitar and an all mahogany Harmony. I picked up some old Kay archtops from 1941 to experiment with (and because they looked cool). Then lastly, there's a harp guitar from Ukraine.



(Above) The second of George's 'twin Lyns' – a 12-fret rosewood and spruce slot-head that he picked up second-hand.

MB: America is traditionally considered to be the home of the modern steel-string guitar, and there is a real wealth of other high-end builders to choose from over there. How do you feel Brooks stack up against, for example, Collings/Santa Cruz/Martin/Taylor etc?

G: I think that for the same price for a new guitar the Brooks are as good or better and have a more fully realised tone (sometimes a guitar almost sounds great, whatever kind of tone it has, but it's missing

one thing or another). Player preference is a big factor because tonally, I don't hear much overlap between a *Lyn*, a *Tamar* or a *Taw*, and a Martin or Gibson-style guitar; and there's even less when compared to a Taylor. To my ear, my Brooks occupy a different tonal space than most American guitars I've listened to or played. Lowden and Avalon are also in a different space, but not the same as Brook. I've wondered what guitars were like in England and

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Acquisition and accumulation

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Ireland prior to 1940 and how that may have influenced the Brook tone.

MB: What sort of music do you play on your Brooks? What music do you listen to/are influenced by? What players do you admire?

G: Solo fingerpicking with a thumbpick and nails in standard, dropped D, and open G, C, and D tunings. It's all instrumental. I've listened to a lot of Fahey and Kottke for a long time, so I'm certainly influenced by their approaches to things like having clearly-stated melodic ideas, leaving space, holding melody notes, letting the guitar ring out, changing tempos, creating texture and a pulse without slapping or tapping and playing a bit unhinged.

I like the way Kenny Anderson (King Creosote) and Tracyanne Campbell phrase melodies, and the way that Olafur Arnalds creates intimate, thoughtful, moments in the music. Mississippi John Hurt had a really relaxed kind of banjo-roll swing style that I like to fall into – I picked that up via Fahey. And I run into music I haven't heard before all the time, so I get a lot of input.

Denise is also an influence; she isn't much for repetitive music, so she keeps me from veering too far off into 'American Primitive Shoegaze'.

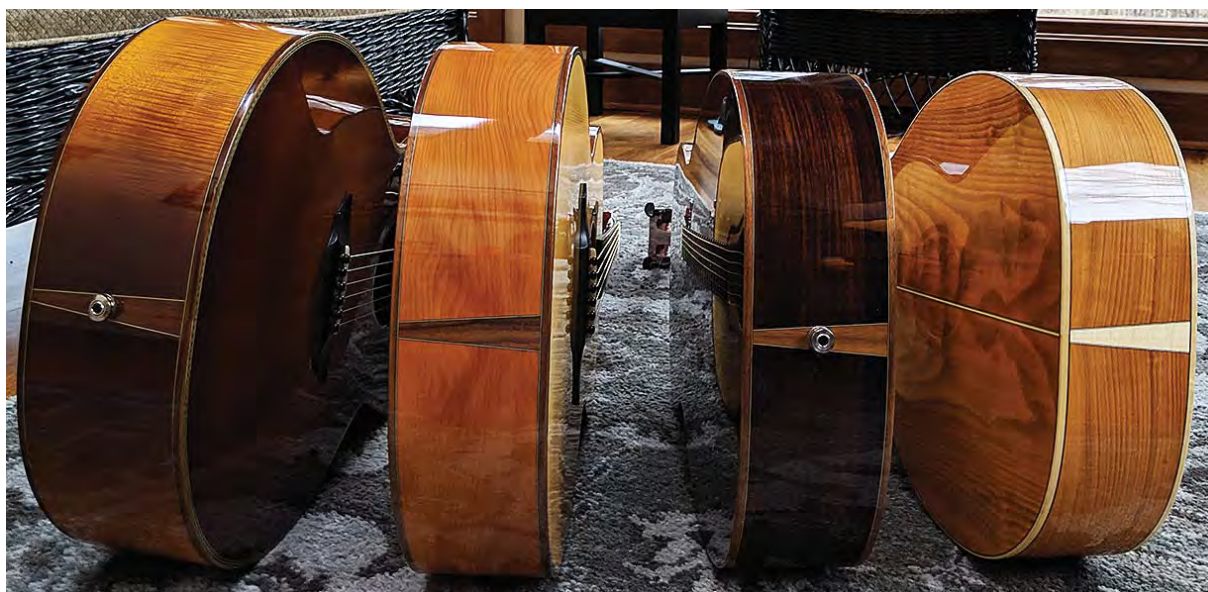
MB: Do you have a different Brook for different styles of music, or are they all pretty versatile within the styles you play?

G: Sort of. I have tunes that work better on one guitar over another. I like to play my stuff on various guitars. Different days I pick up different guitars and then run through a bunch of things. Different guitars provoke different reactions and I'll discover new things to add to a particular tune. Sometimes tunes sound more interesting on a different guitar. I was playing Fahey's 'Beverly' on a D-28. I approached that song based on how the cherry *Lyn* wanted to be played and ended up with a different version of the song that I like, and it works better on the cherry *Lyn* than on the *Tamar* or *Taw*, for example.

MB: Do you have a particular favourite, which

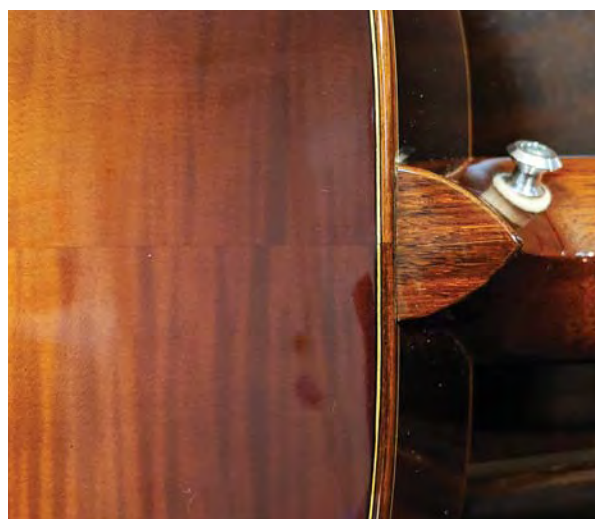
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It's great to have so many different Brook guitars to play. You can really hear the wood, and they all have a different version of the clear, musical, articulate Brook tone...





(Below) Another of George's used finds, and his third Brook – a 2002 sunburst Tamar in maple and spruce “with that clean, musical Brook tone, and an intriguing low end...”



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you would never want to part with – if you had to choose just one, for example (perish the thought!)?

G: The cherry *Lyn*; it's very personable and pleasing to be around.

MB: Have you ever got rid of any Brooks to fund a new build – then wished in hindsight that you hadn't?

G: I have an accumulationist's aversion to parting with acoustic guitars, so I haven't done that yet. But I have sold off some of the electrics I carried around for years.

MB: Are there any particular climate/temperature/humidity issues in your part of the world that you have to be wary of in relation to your acoustic guitars?

G: Winter is the only time of year that I have to worry about humidity; it can get close to 20% when it gets cold, so I run humidifiers. The guitars are kept in a

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(Left) George's Brook collection backs to back (from left): maple Tamar, yew Taw and the 'twin Lyns' in rosewood and cherry.



Acquisition and accumulation

from page 18

in a single room with a door, so I can keep the humidity up around 40 percent as long as I keep carrying water. It's pretty unnerving being near a big 12-string when the top pops from being dry, so I've learned my lesson! I'm not driving around town with these guitars so they have a pretty nice life.

MB: Brook usually offers a free first set-up/guitar service to customers after they've spent a little time with their guitars – distance is obviously a slight hurdle here, so...do you maintain your instruments yourself, or do you have a regular 'go to' repair person/luthier that you trust?

G: Man, I wish I could bring them by the shop! I've been tweaking them myself so far. Andy and Simon have been helpful. I have contemplated the concept of sending one over if it needed something significant, but I haven't had to cross that bridge yet. My Brooks were all in very good shape when I got them and don't need anything like fretwork at this point. I have sent guitars to a guy north of Boston, who builds excellent, high-end guitars and does great repair work and enhancements. His work is well worth the extra expense.

MB: Any final thoughts on Brook guitars?

G: It's great to have so many different Brook guitars to play. Once the strings break in you can really hear the wood and they all have a different version of the clear, musical, articulate Brook tone. Guitars I've heard that have a tone as interesting to me and as clearly defined as a Brook usually are north of \$5K (sometimes by a lot). I also like the Hofner-esque three-dot octave markers.

MB: Simon recently described you on the Brook website as 'to our knowledge, the first Brook collector over in the U.S.' So, finally, what's 'the next one' going to be (because there's ALWAYS got to be a 'next one'!)?

G: I do want to buy another guitar from Simon and Andy. I've been intrigued by Levin guitars and the LTS-5 12-string seemed like a cool concept until I learned how over-built they were. I've also been thinking that a 14-fret, 12-string maple *Teign* would be cool. *Or...maybe I'll just get a tiny guitar and then visit the shop so they can take my picture...*

I do want to buy another guitar from Simon and Andy. Maybe I'll just get a tiny guitar and then visit the shop so they can take my picture...



Dealership Profile

Celtic Chords TRADITIONAL MUSIC SHOP

Aberdeenshire-based **Celtic Chords** is one of a select number of our 'shopfront' dealerships in the UK, where many customers 'north of the border' first discover Brook Guitars for themselves. In the latest of a series of dealership profile articles, owner **Pete Murray** tells **Martin Bell** how he steered a course for Scotland, via a yacht design business in our own West Country...

MB: Could you start by telling us a little of your own background, and how/when Celtic Chords was founded?

PM: I went to boarding school from an early age due to my parents living abroad, and from there I ended up at naval college and, subsequently pursued a naval career as a junior deck officer.

After leaving the navy, I moved back to my roots in the West Country, and started up a yacht design and boat building company in Devon, which I ran for about five years. In late 1979 – I moved up to Aberdeen, Scotland with the offer of a career in the oil industry due to my naval background. I was fortunate to have 25 years working in the industry, both in the UK and abroad as a commercial analyst.

The move was financially good for me and, having worked for Shell Expro for a number of years, I had the opportunity to take early retirement in 2002, which enabled me to then pursue my passion to set up and run a traditional music shop.



The picturesque north-east coastal harbour village of Stonehaven, home to Celtic Chords.



Celtic Chords owner Pete Murray and his staff Nicola and Lesley (green tee-shirt) – with several Brooks in the background.

North of the border...

I received my first guitar aged 11 whilst at boarding school and formed a folk trio, then progressed to electric guitar and rock music during my time at naval college. I think my taste in music has probably gone full circle over the years, from folk to rock and blues music and back to celtic folk music.

In 1995, I moved to a wee village south of Aberdeen where I now live (Auchenblae), and was introduced to a fiddle player, who went on to become a good friend. He coerced me into backing his fiddle tunes on guitar and so I became immersed in the traditional Scottish/Irish folk music genre. We occasionally play in a local ceilidh band covering weddings and functions.

When I retired from the oil industry, my aspiration was to circumnavigate the world on my sailboat...or to open a traditional music shop. The music shop option won over, obviously, but I still have a real passion for sailing and keep a yacht on the Scottish west coast,

where I am able to escape to, usually once a month.

MB: Can you give us a bit of a profile of the store and your customer 'demographic'?

PM: I found a commercial premises/shop which was for sale 15 minutes' commute from my village and was in the fortunate position of being able to purchase it outright. My aim was to create a music store with a special ambience, so I spent two months redesigning and redecorating the interior with my joiner. The shop interior has lots of custom-made fittings using a herringbone wood design for the walls, handmade glass/wooden cabinets for smaller instruments and ceiling-hanging wooden racks which I designed for some of the 50 fiddles we stock.

We opened the shop for business in March 2003

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which I manage with the help of two friends (Lesley & Nicola) who work here part-time. Lesley is a fiddle player and Nicola plays the bodhran (hand drum) in our ceilidh band, so both ladies are conversant with the instruments we sell.

Most of our customers are local musicians from the North-East of Scotland – many of whom are professional or semi-professional players. We do also regularly have visiting musicians from all over Scotland and further afield, due to the unique niche nature of the shop, to seek out some of the gorgeous hand-made acoustic instruments we stock.

Our stock includes a sizable collection of high-end handmade instruments such as Brook guitars – octave mandolas, bouzoukis, banjos and mandolins, of which we probably have the largest collection in Scotland.

We also have an ecommerce database-driven website – www.celtic-chords.co.uk – which generates a reasonable amount of sales for us both home and abroad. In fact, we have many web customers in Europe (not sure of the Brexit impact yet!) and as far away as the USA, Canada and Australia.

In addition to the instruments we stock, we have a big selection of approximately 1,000 traditional and Celtic music CDs, hundreds of music books and many accessories. We've tried to make Celtic Chords a very niche shop with all-acoustic instruments and a mainly traditional music theme.



Scottish fiddle music in his day).

The area around here in North-East Scotland has a tradition of fiddle playing and was the birthplace of James Scott Skinner (1843-1927), the self-styled 'Strathspey King', was the leading performer of

Being close to Aberdeen (which was considered the oil capital of Europe), there was a lot of wealth generated in this area and lots of disposable income for purchasing high-end instruments. With the downturn in North Sea oil exploration and production and the uncertainty of Brexit, we have experienced a slight reduction in instrument sales generally, but hopefully the situation may improve in the future.

When I retired, my aspiration was to circumnavigate the world on my sailboat or to open a traditional music shop. The music shop option won over, obviously...



MB: What's the music scene like in your part of the world?

PM: The music population is predominantly traditional Scottish/Irish music, and there are many music sessions in pubs virtually every night of the week. I suppose our 'typical customers' are aged 40 and over, but there are many young people involved in music too. We have an annual folk festival in Stonehaven (12-14 July 2019) with

visiting musicians from many different countries. There is also an emphasis on the encouragement of young musicians with many music workshops and venues for young musicians to perform.

MB: How/when did you first discover Brook Guitars?

PM: I'd never heard of Brook Guitars until I met

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North of the border...

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Steve Smith, who runs Intersound Music in Dursley, Gloucestershire. He frequently came up to Stonehaven to visit his daughter, discovered my shop, and was praising the virtues of Brook Guitars.

Although we already stocked a selection of handmade guitar brands, I contacted Brook, spoke to Simon and Andy and expressed an interest in stocking their guitars. At that time, they were snowed under with work, so they couldn't commit to another retailer. Fast forwarding to a year or so later, Steve was down at Easterbrook and I assume he gave my shop a good endorsement, because I was then contacted by the lads, who thankfully enabled me to stock their lovely instruments.

MB: How do you rate Brooks (as a player/dealer/businessman/collector?)

PM: The guitars have been really well-received. Not many people knew/know about them up here, but only yesterday I had an email from a potential customer in Ayreshire (130 miles away) expressing an interest in some of the Brooks we have in stock. Hopefully, that might be a future sale.

We have sold Brooks to customers throughout Scotland and other parts of the UK and even other EU countries, so the word must be spreading! Generally, when I have a customer coming in to look at handmade guitars, they've always been really pleasantly surprised by how good and inspiring the Brooks are, and they seem to sell themselves without any sales encouragement.

MB: Do you stock Brooks 'off the peg', or do you ever order any custom models?

PM: If they have the tonewoods in stock, Simon and Andy are very obliging and will make an instrument with your chosen wood combination. One of the



When I have a customer coming in to look at handmade guitars, they've always been pleasantly surprised by how good and inspiring the Brooks are, and they seem to sell themselves without any sales encouragement...

Brooks currently in stock at Celtic Chords (at time of writing):

Lyn with spruce top, mahogany back and sides;
Tamar with spruce top, cherry back and sides;
Tamar with spruce top, walnut back and sides;
Tamar with spruce top, walnut back and sides, and a Florentine cutaway;
Torrige with spruce top, bubinga back and sides;
 plus, four guitars on order!

recent Brooks I sold was a beautiful **Clyst** parlour sized guitar, with maple back and sides – it was the loudest parlour I've ever played, a great little guitar with gorgeous tone. I mostly stock their 'standard' models and specify the tonewoods required for each guitar.

MB: Is there any such thing as a 'typical Brook customer' at Celtic Chords?

PM: Aged over 50, usually! However, a couple of years ago a young doctor from Dundee who had heard about Brooks came in and after playing a few, ordered one from me. There is a customer (even older than me!) who lives near here and plays a Brook in a blues band. I think he bought it many years ago down south and was surprised to find Brooks for sale so far north.

MB: Have you ever been down to Easterbrook to visit or to collect new stock in person?

PM: Yes, I've been down to Easterbrook on a few occasions. The first time – and I'm sure this story will resonate with anyone else who has been there – I got within half a mile of the place and it then took me almost a further hour to find them! I punched the postcode into the sat nav and ended up on completely the wrong side of the valley...and driving across the wee bridge (over the brook itself) can sometimes be an act of faith. Think I'll visit in the Discovery 4x4 next time!

MB: Any final thoughts/comments?

PM: I just really like the company and the guys at Brook. They're very easy to deal with, very friendly – and long may they continue to do what they're doing making beautiful instruments...

www.celtic-chords.co.uk
Tel: 01569 763913

CITES and sounds

As some of you may be aware changes to the way that rosewood and bubinga are traded came into force on the 2nd January 2017. In this article, we take a brief look at what it all means for you, your instruments...and us as guitar makers...

Implementation of the new guidelines was unusually swift; the decision was made at the 17th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species held in South Africa (24 September-4 October 2016, CITES CoP17), and the law came into force just three months later.



This obviously created concern, not only for us as guitar makers and our customers, but also for the government offices that had to quickly develop systems to administer the licences and cope with a sudden demand on their services. It took just over three months for us to obtain a permit for the first rosewood guitar that we sent to the USA.

So, what does it mean for you?

The law does not apply to guitars that are being traded within the borders of one country, but any time an instrument with rosewood is sold internationally (or, in our case, outside of the EU) it requires CITES certification.

The tonewoods affected are:

- All rosewood
- Granadillo
- African Blackwood
- Cocobolo
- Kingwood
- Bubinga
- Any other member of the Dalbergia family of woods

What you can't do:

You're not allowed to import a guitar from outside the EU without CITES certification, which must state the source of the rosewood. This certification is the responsibility of the exporter.

Neither can you sell a guitar internationally without CITES certification. The seller is ALWAYS responsible for this, even if it was CITES certified from the retailer you purchased it from.

Whether buying/importing or selling, if the guitar was made 'pre-CITES' from rosewood, it still needs to be accompanied by a CITES certificate, and marked pre-convention, stating that it was made before CITES came into effect.

What doesn't change?

Apart from buying and selling guitars, there aren't any changes – just don't try and bring back a load of rosewood from your latest trip to India!

You can still travel freely with your instrument, as long as you are with it and it has less than 10kg/22lbs of regulated materials. This does not require CITES certification.

And you can still buy and sell rosewood within your country without any certification.

So, what happens after Brexit?

Well, that's the 64,000-euro question! The simple answer is...nobody knows right now. Unless we come up with a 'special arrangement', then it seems likely that we'll need to get a permit to export to Europe and pay a fee to import any of the rosewood family of woods into the UK. I expect we'll import larger quantities at a time to help reduce the impact.

The future...

The initial panic has now subsided, and all the

talk of rosewood guitars being banned etc has proved to be groundless. It really is a straightforward paper exercise that monitors the passage of rosewood and other 'Appendix 2' woods between countries.

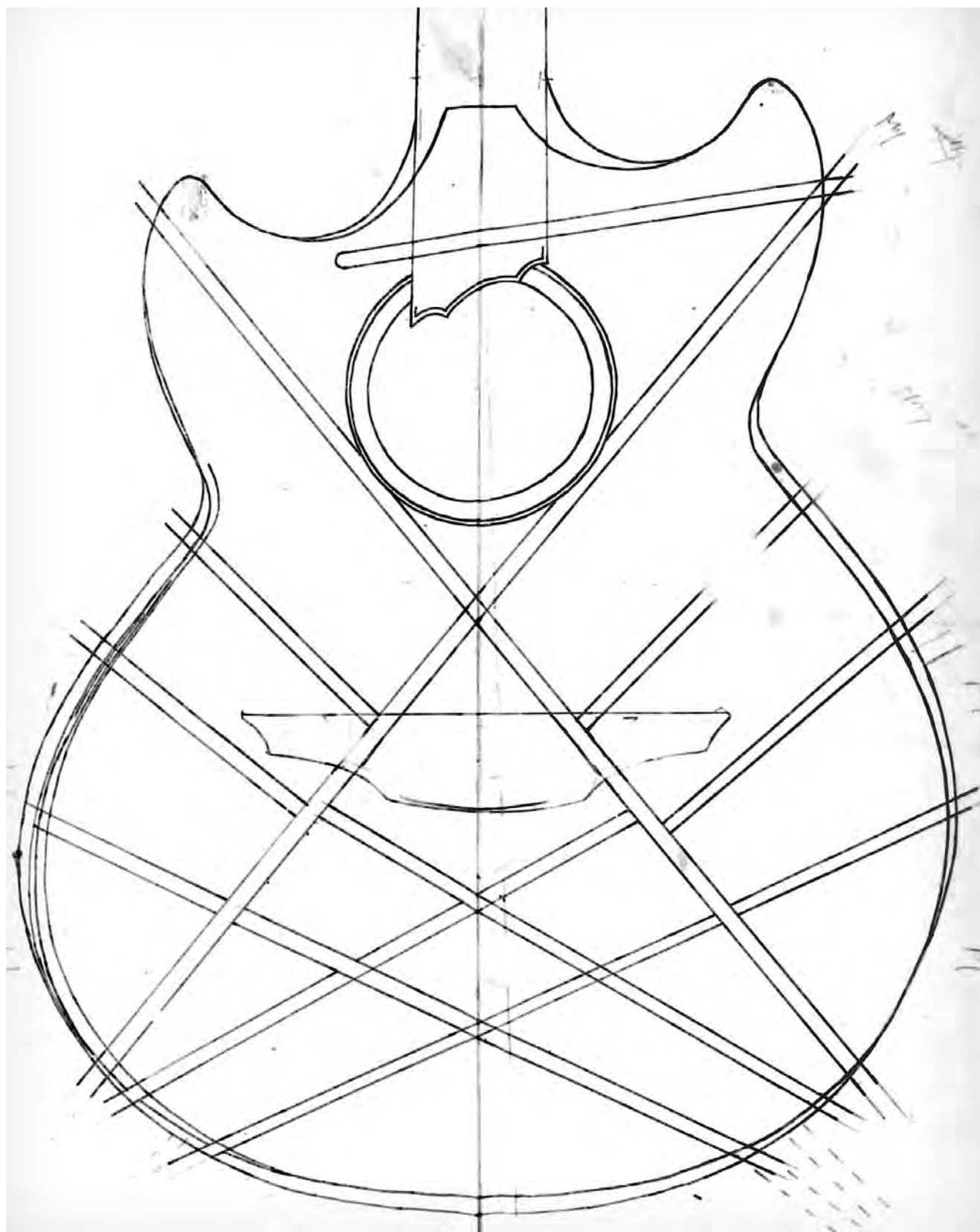
We apply for the permit as the guitars enter the spray room and the permit is with us before we're ready to send the guitar out! Naturally, there's a fee involved – £59 per consignment – which, although unwelcome, is a small proportion of the total cost of a high-end guitar.

From the outset, as guitar builders we've always promoted the use of both re-claimed and native timbers with great success. In fact, some of the finest-sounding guitars we've built use backs and sides made from English cherry.

In conclusion, we're confident that whatever the powers that be decide to throw at us, we'll be still making fine guitars and shipping them around the globe for years to come...

HERE at Brook Guitars, we've always been more than happy to customise our standard range of instruments. But sometimes, customers want something just a little bit (and sometimes a lot!) different. Which usually means...

Going off-plan...



WHEN we started Brook Guitars 20-something years ago, after working with Andy Manson, we had five models in our range: The *Taw*, *Torridge*, *Lyn*, *Tavy* and the *Bovey*.

We thought that covered pretty much all bases (not basses – they came later!) but it wasn't long before the additional models started mounting up – plus a number of one-offs that didn't really warrant a mention in our catalogue, or have fallen by the wayside if we didn't think anyone else would show an interest in them.

Just for fun, we thought we would talk about some of those models first and, just maybe, you'll be interested enough in them for us to brush the dust off the plans and let them see the light of day again...

For each new model, we first draw up a plan, showing the body shape, bridge position, scale length and any other features relevant to the build.

If we then intend to go ahead we have to make up a wooden mould to support the body while it's going together. Making the mould takes a good afternoon's work, so once that's done we're pretty much committed to building the instrument!

Nowadays we're fonder of plainer, simpler designs, but as fresh-faced, scruffy, not quite middle-aged young luthiers we wanted to come up with some individual designs of our own.

The first of these was the double-cutaway *Dart* (left), of which we made around 10, but it was tricky to produce and we eventually dropped it from the catalogue about 15 years ago.

continued on page 25



(Above) The model that first 'broke the mould' of our standard range of guitars, the double-cutaway **Dart**. At least two customers went for a sunburst finish on theirs, too...

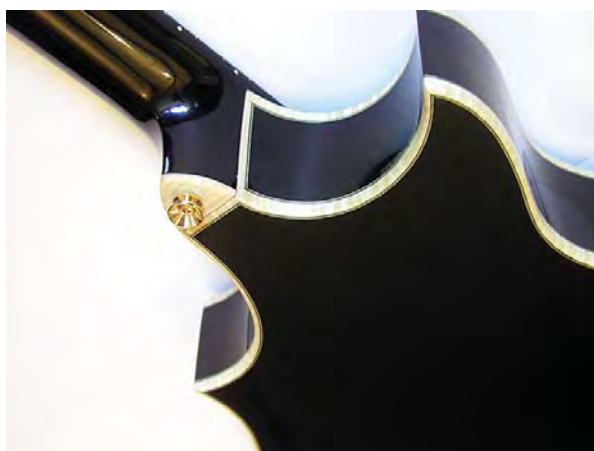
from page 24

Quite early on, we had a commission to build a guitar/banjo for Billy Connolly's 60th birthday so we came up with a novel design incorporating an 'f' hole in the normal sound-hole position.

We enjoyed building this for Billy and were really pleased with the result. And since that first model, we've built another five or six in different formats - either as banjos, tenor guitars, or dulcimer guitars.



(Above and below) Billy's banjo...or is it a guitar?



Some customers send us designs ranging from rough sketches to fairly intricate plans...we do our best to adapt their original design so that it's aesthetically pleasing and will actually physically play in tune...

We've a number of customers who have built up a collection of our instruments, and it's often these folk who are the people that ask for something a little different...

For example, **Michael** – who designed our first

website – had a succession of green instruments, one of which was a semi-acoustic lap steel with a Hipshot multi-tuning bridge. We made no mould for this one and built it freehand!

Another freehand build was the ebony and maple Art Deco-style tenor guitar for **Mike** (see page 26). For this one, we drew out a rough plan...and figured out all the intricacies as we built it! We also built a beautiful fairly small-bodied carved arch-top for Mike with a fleur-de-lis pierced sound-hole.

Some customers will send us designs ranging from rough sketches to fairly intricate plans – without necessarily understanding the consequences of bridge placement, scale length and the tradition of a 12 or 14-fret body join. In those cases, we do our best to adapt their original design so that it's aesthetically pleasing and will actually physically play in tune.

continued on page 26



Green machine...Michael's semi-acoustic lap steel, complete with Hipshot multi-tuning bridge.

Going off-plan...

from page 25

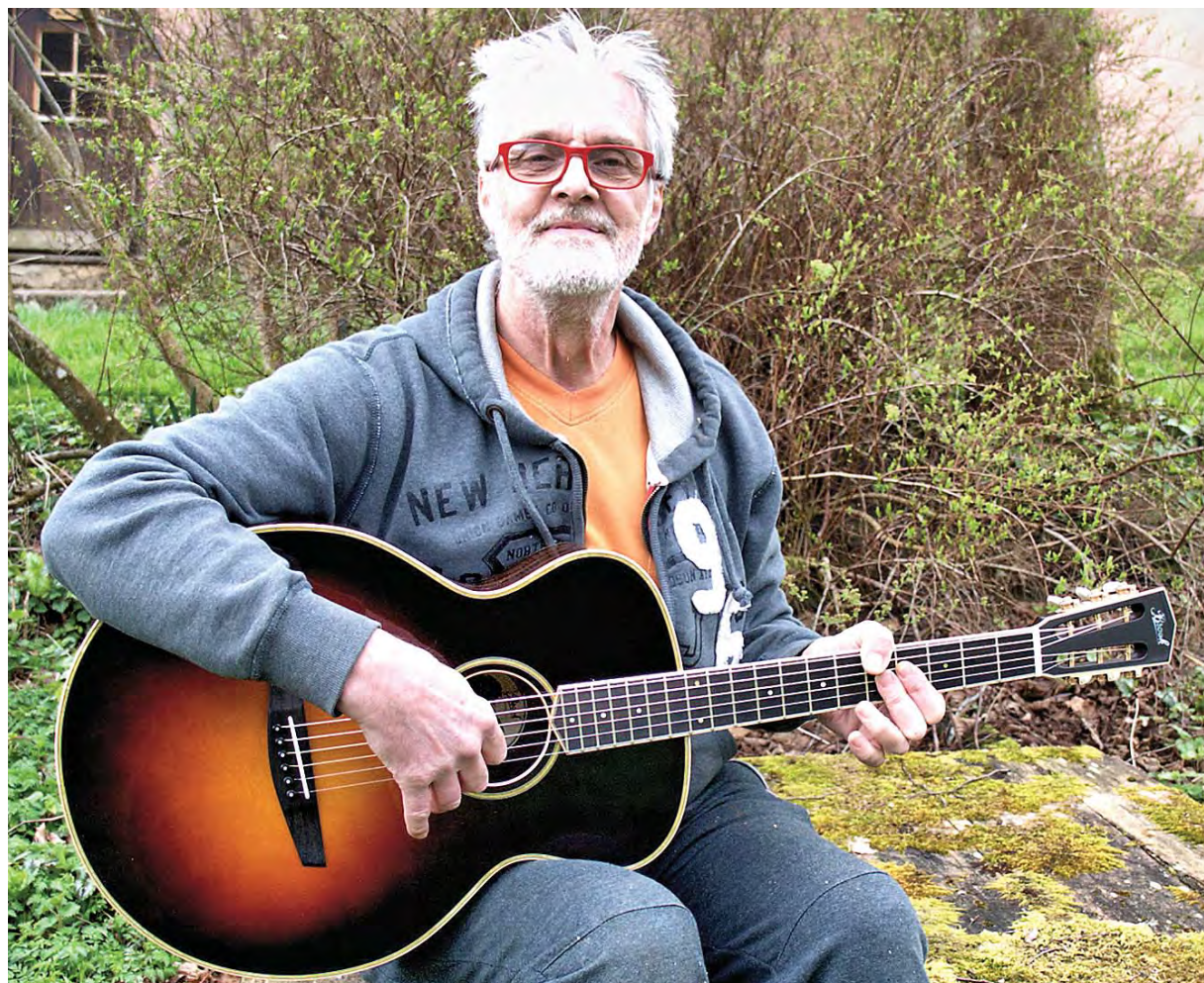
Daniel's Tidan (*below*) – named after the river in Sweden at the bottom of his garden – was one that springs to mind. We've only ever made one, but it's an interesting model that I think it's about time to build another.

Bob was another customer whose collection of Brooks were very individual. We built a thin-line cutaway electric guitar for him, based on the shape of our *Taw*. The detailing was all to Bob's design and it had a couple of Charlie Christian-style pickups – maybe not to everyone's taste, but the build certainly threw up a lot of challenges and we were pleased with the final result.

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(Above, clockwise from top) Another green guitar, this time a *Tavy*; Mike's carved arch-top, with fleur-de-lis soundhole; Bob's thinline electric with Charlie Christian pick-ups; Mike's Art Deco-style nylon-string tenor guitar (as featured in 'Babbling Brook' issue 3).



(Left) Bob with our long-scale, 12-fret take on his 'oversized Gibson L-0' commission.

from page 26

Another of Bob's was a sort of oversized Gibson L-0 style; the problem was Bob initially wanted a shortish scale and a 14-fret body joint. We had to physically draw it out before he could understand that the bridge position and neck just wouldn't have been in proportion! The compromise – without changing the body size – was a long-scale, 12-fretter ...and a fine-looking guitar.

There have been lots of highly-customised Brooks over the years. Unlike those already mentioned, most have been based on, and adapted from, existing models: both seven and eight-course guitars, bouzouki guitars, acoustic basses – fretted and fretless – tenors, plus a variety of instruments in the mandolin/mandola range.

You may have noticed on our website that certain models aren't mentioned on the appropriate pages, while others don't have photographs at all. That's partly due to slackness on our part – we're a small team, and just don't seem to find the time to keep up with this quite as well as we possibly should!

One of our standard models is the **Cary**, our nylon-

Some models have arisen from us being able to source a specific size case! When we discovered we could get a decent 3/4 size case, for example, we developed the Creedy and, later, the Weaver...

(Below and right) A cutaway nylon-strung Cary, in spruce and bubinga, with figured bubinga soundhole rosette.



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Going off-plan...

from page 27

strung model. We've made it since the early days of Brook Guitars and it still hasn't made it into the catalogue range, even though we've made a dozen or so in all, as well as nylon-strung *Torridges* and *Lyns*.

Other standards such as the *Tamar* arose from a specific need: we wanted a longer scale, deeper model similar to the *Taw*, so initially we wedged out the *Taw* mould and built a few like that before adapting the shape slightly and building a separate mould for the *Tamar*.

Other instruments have gradually developed when we thought we could do with something larger, smaller – or in between – existing models.

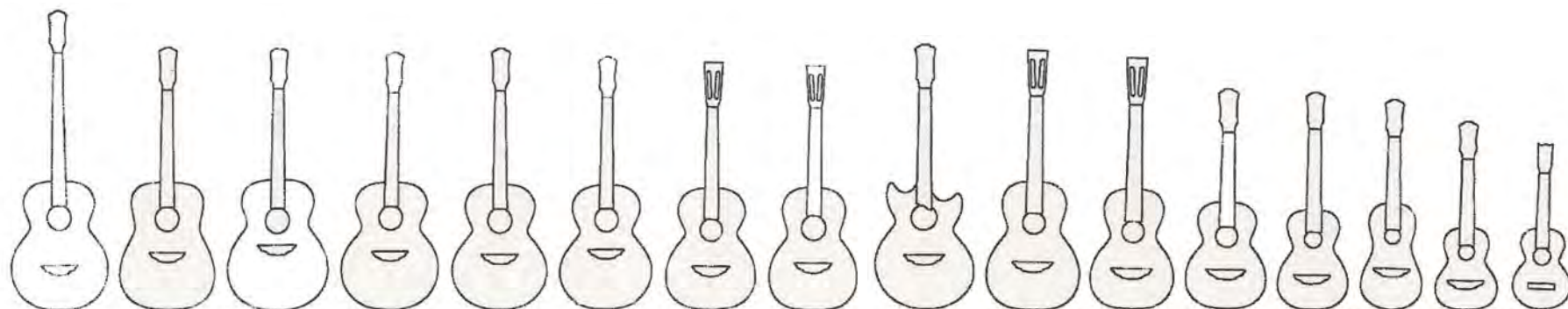
And some models have arisen from us being able to source a specific size case! When we discovered we could get a decent 3/4 size case, for example, we developed the *Creedy* and, later, the *Weaver*. Some of the smaller guitars like the *Bovey* and *Little Silver* have changed as well, as the availability of smaller gig bags or hard cases change.

We seem now to have a basic list of around 20 instruments; in the last five years, we've added the *Lamorna* – our OM-style guitar – and the *Newlyn*, our 000. The latest two: the *Abbey*, we developed for Ian Anderson (of *Jethro Tull*), and the *Calder* for Steve Tilston (see page 11), both seem to be becoming popular additions to the range.

As most Brook customers will know, all our guitars – with the exception of the *Tidan* – are named after West Country rivers. Fortunately, there are at least a few more to go at if our range gets any bigger..!



(Above, clockwise from top) Rosa Rebecka with her nylon-strung *Lyn* (as featured in 'Babbling Brook' issue 3); the *Abbey*, originally designed for Ian Anderson; our recent 000 guitar, the *Newlyn*; Si playing our first ever *Holly* travel guitar, back in 2004; the *Lamorna*, our take on the classic OM; (centre, from top) the moustache bridge on an early incarnation of the *Abbey* – we called it the *Fingle* – made for author Tom Cutler; and a lovely single-pickup jazz guitar, based on our *Tamar* model.



An etude in Solitude



“

The tune was written on my Brook Torridge. I had not composed anything whatsoever prior to owning this guitar – which, for me, is a testament to how inspirational I find Brook guitars...

”



from page 2

relatively easy piece of music to play (not least because I wrote it!) and it may, therefore, be accessible to those of you who are new to the alternate tuning of CGCGCD, as I was at the time.

Through my own experiences when learning any piece of music, I would recommend that you first learn the melody by listening to the audio, and then start working on the arrangement from the video.

You will soon realise when listening to this piece that it is very much 'rubato' (the temporary disregarding of strict tempo to allow an expressive quickening or slowing) all the way through – so you can forget about using your metronomes!!

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A PLACE FOR SOLITUDE

TUNING: CGCGCD PHIL TAYLOR

♩ = 95

ACOUSTIC GUITAR

LET THE NOTES RING

ACOUSTIC GUITAR TAB

A. GTR.

GTR .TAB

RIT. A TEMPO

RIT. A TEMPO

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An etude in Solitude



from page 29

The fingering throughout is relatively simple, there are no difficult stretches to speak of – and bars 12 and 13 contain the only barre chords in the piece, which are repeated again later.

The opening four bars really set the tone in terms of how the tune should be played. The notes must not be dampened at all and should be left to ring out, with plenty of space in between the different phrases.

You will hear straight away in bars 1 and 2 the dissonance created between the 12th fret harmonic C and the B note fretted at the ninth fret of the top string. This is an effect in music to create tension and the desire for it to be resolved. I have used it in a small number of locations throughout the piece and I will leave it for your own ears to pick them out as you progress through.

In bar 24, the main variation of the piece, the timing changes from 4/4 to 9/8 – and there is even a single bar of 5/4! – but please don't be put off by any of this, because I can assure you when I wrote it I just played what felt right. Just let it flow.

Also to be seen here is a 'musical term' i.e. *piu mosso*, which is a direction to the performer to play the section of music faster than the previous section. Again, let the audio be a guide for you here.

continued on page 31



Sheet music for "An etude in Solitude" (continued from page 29). The music is written for Acoustic Guitar (A. GTR.) and includes guitar tablature (A. GTR. TAB).

The score is divided into systems, each starting with a measure number (13, 16, 19, 22). The notation includes standard musical notation (treble clef, key signature of one flat, time signature changes) and guitar-specific notation (fingering numbers, barre lines, and harmonic markings).

Key markings and tempo changes include:

- RIT.** (Ritardando) at measure 13.
- HARM.** (Harmonic) markings at measures 16, 19, and 22.
- RALL.** (Ritardando) at measure 22.
- PIÙ MOSSO** (Faster) at measure 22.

The tablature shows fret numbers (0-12) and includes specific instructions for harmonics and bends.

An etude in Solitude



25

A. GTR.

RIT.

A. GTR. TAB

28

A. GTR.

RALL.

RIT.

A. GTR. TAB

31

A. GTR.

HARM. ---|

A. GTR. TAB

34

A. GTR.

HARM. ---|

RIT.

A. GTR. TAB

37

A. GTR.

ALISS. ALISS.

MOLTO RIT.

A. GTR. TAB

40

A. GTR.

A. GTR. TAB

43

A. GTR.

HARM. ---|

RIT.

A TEMPO

HARM. ---|

A. GTR. TAB

YouTube

Search



Phil Taylor - A Place For Solitude

from page 30

This piece can be seen played 'live' here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_YiKlwDDw

A better recording of the piece appears on my album '*One Year On*' which can be heard here:

<https://philiptaylor1.bandcamp.com/track/a-place-for-solitude>

I hope you enjoy having a go at this and I'd be interested in hearing the results!

Finally, special thanks to **Robbie Jessep** for turning my 'rough draft' tablature into the fine, professional-looking notation on these pages...

Phil

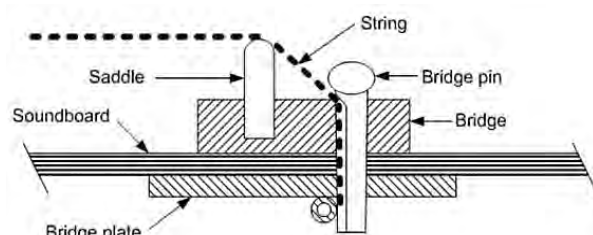
From our original 'bat-wing', through moustaches and pyramids to more radical contemporary styles, the bridges on Brook guitars have seen a few changes over the years. Our own **Andy Petherick** looks at a little of what's involved in...

Building bridges

THE bridge on a flat top guitar allows the strings to be attached to the soundboard. This, in turn, serves several functions:

- it provides a means of anchoring the strings;
- it holds the saddle in a fixed position to allow for accurate intonation;
- it spreads the tension of the strings and enables the transfer of sound over a wider area;
- it gives additional bracing to the front of the guitar;
- and finally, it should be aesthetically pleasing!

Here at Brook, we've always preferred using pin bridges on our steel-string guitars. We like the ease with which we can remove and refit the strings during set-ups.



More importantly, we also believe that it relieves some of the tension between the bridge and the soundboard. It's possible for a pin-less bridge to become completely detached from the front of the guitar, whereas on a pin bridge this simply doesn't happen, because the strings are fixed to the bridge plate underneath the top, rather than on the bridge itself (see diagram, above).

The tension given by the strings varies greatly, from 85lb (38.5 kg) for standard tension classics, 160lb (72.5 kg) for a set of six light gauge steels to a whopping 250lb (113kg) for a set of light gauge strings for a 12-string. Blimey – I've got motorbikes lighter than that!!

All guitars are built with string tension in mind. There is some leeway but if, for instance, you built a guitar for very light strings and then put on some heavy strings it's quite possible the top would start to lift and the bridge would begin to tip forward.

Much is made by some guitar companies of the break

angle of the string over the saddle. Our view is that it's largely irrelevant to the tone of the guitar – however, there does need to be a sufficient break angle to prevent the string buzzing (sitar) on the saddle, but not so much as to force the saddle forward. This is especially important when an under-saddle transducer is used.

As you can see from the pictures on the right, we've made several bridge shapes over the years. Some are based on traditional designs – pyramid bridges, Martin belly bridges and, of course, classical-style bridges. I think without exception these have all been adapted by Simon, usually making them slightly longer and more slim-line than the originals.

I came up with the original 'bat-wing' shape as part of the design of the *Torridge*, which I built for myself when we were working with Andy Manson; Simon has since tweaked the shape to give us the version we use today.

Other bridge designs have been at the request of clients; for instance, we made a moustache bridge to replicate a customer's own facial adornment (see page 28); we've made bridges simply to suit the style of guitar we were building at the time – such as the Art Deco-style tenor guitar we made for Mike (page 26); moustache bridges for parlour guitars; and, of course, there are the asymmetric and aesthetic challenges thrown up when it comes to designing something suitable for a fan-fret guitar. We've even occasionally made – despite our best efforts to persuade the customer otherwise – the odd pin-less bridge!

We usually make our bridges from ebony, a traditional material for a bridge and one which we think gives a nice uniform look when used in conjunction with an ebony head veneer and fingerboard. We've also used several species of rosewood and slightly more unusual materials – Anjan from Africa and 4,000 years-old bog oak retrieved from the Norfolk fens, for instance.

All of our bridges are made by hand and slightly different in size, heights and camber to suit the guitar they're being fitted to; we also shape the underside of the bridge individually to match the slight (intentional) bow in the soundboard. This gives us tremendous flexibility to accommodate any unusual ideas you may



have and – as any of you who have gone through the process of custom-ordering one of our guitars will know – it's one of the items on the checklist that we discuss during the early stages.

Andy