

*Mabel Johnston was Arnold Dolmetsch's third wife, the mother of Cécile, Nathalie, Rudolph and Carl who all contributed to the world of early music. She became the Viola da Gamba Society's first President, and her two daughters followed her in the same role. This article outlines her life and contribution to the work of the Dolmetsch family as instrument maker, performer and researcher.*

## Mabel Dolmetsch (1874 – 1963)

Mabel's great-great-grandfather, a wool factor, left Glasgow for London in the eighteenth century. His eldest son gained distinction at the siege of Gibraltar (1779-1783) before settling in Kennington, then a village to the south of Georgian London.<sup>1</sup>

It was here that Mabel's grandfather, John Johnston, and father, John Brookes Johnston, were born and pursued careers in insurance. John Johnston became secretary of the Royal Exchange Assurance Company. His son, John Brookes Johnston, helped found and became secretary of the Royal Insurance Company.

Mabel Johnston was born in Kennington on 6 August 1874, the youngest daughter of John Brookes Johnston and his second wife Esther Laetitia Hamilton. Alexander (Alex) Johnston, her youngest brother, described the family as suburban, 'touched with some romance.'<sup>2</sup>

Alex claims that the artistic talent in the family came from the Hamiltons who had produced several painters and the actress Anne (Nance) Oldfield, celebrated in the reign of Queen Anne. Mabel's older brother Henry (Harry) spent four years studying painting at the Royal Academy before becoming a colonial administrator. Lilian (Lily) studied at a school for art in Camberwell. Another brother, Philip Mainwaring Johnston, became a noted architect and an expert on Sussex churches.<sup>3</sup>

We know a lot about life at Tudor House, 203 Grove Lane, Kennington, from letters written in the early 1890s by an older sister, Agnes Johnston, to her fiancé, William Yule, and by her father to her.<sup>4</sup>

The household was substantial: "I [Agnes] have my bedroom all to myself and Papa, Leonard, Philip, Percy, Alec (Alexander or Alex) and Lily all have rooms to themselves. Esther and Tom (Mary Rosa) share a room and Lou-Lou (Louisa) and Mabel; beside we have two servants bedrooms and a spare bedroom, 3 sitting-rooms for ourselves and a servant's sitting-room and 2 kitchens, so we have plenty of space. It is hard work to see that everything is kept nice for we have only four maids and a gardener. We have a sewing maid one day a week to

---

<sup>1</sup> This part of London is now called Camberwell in the borough of Southwark.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander (Alex) Johnston was his brother Sir Harry's private secretary. He wrote 'The Life and Letters of Sir Harry Johnston' published in 1929 by Jonathan Cape.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Mainwaring's daughter Theodosia (Thea) Mabel Johnston, actor and writer, married Stanford Holme. Stanford had many affairs, including with harpsichordist Violet Gordon Woodhouse's niece, Elizabeth Gwynne, better known as the cookery writer Elizabeth David.

<sup>4</sup> I wish to thank Michelle Morrison for providing relevant material from these letters.

do all the mending and we always have a charwoman every Wednesday to turn out the drawing room which is a very big room involving a lot of work.”<sup>5 6</sup>

Other siblings had left home. Mabel's sister Annette married James Henderson in 1892 and was living in Littlehampton. Mabel spent time there helping with her sister's baby Donald, the survivor of twin boys. Later visits brought Mabel into contact with Henderson neighbours; in particular, the Kibblewhites, whose daughter, Diana Poulton, became a Dolmetsch pupil.<sup>7</sup> At that time, Harry was in Africa as a member of Her Majesty's Commission in Nyasaland.

Mabel's parents were members of the Catholic Apostolic Church, a chiliastic sect that abhorred the accumulation of wealth. As Alex explained, there was 'sufficient means for thought and leisure and not enough to encourage loafing.' Religious observances were important. In December 1894, writing to his daughter Agnes, now married, living in Darjeeling, India, and newly a mother, John Brookes writes: "Our dear Mabel has just returned from receiving the Laying on of Hands at Gordon Square and I trust our little meek one [Agnes' daughter, Heather] will receive the fullness of the blessing of The Holy Ghost in the Holy Rite."<sup>8</sup>

All the girls received a liberal education and were encouraged in their music, in art, and to learn foreign languages. In her teens, Mabel had a good knowledge of both French and Italian. The girls would go together to the theatre. In October 1892, Agnes writes that Mabel has, "grey eyes and a quantity of light hair."<sup>9</sup>

In an 1893 letter she writes: "Mabel has a sweet, round, innocent, cherubic face and a very pretty profile. She is very intelligent and as good as gold. I have a great respect for her character." We learn too of Mabel's taste in clothes: on one occasion, a simple grey and white dress; on another, a charming 'empire' dress of white crepe over white satin, with large white satin sleeves: and that her pet fear were ghosts, which were reputed to haunt the house's spare bedroom!

Mabel could spend up to 6 hours a day practicing scales, and what Agnes calls 'maddening exercises' and 'fidgety' pieces. From the drawing room, the sound of the piano infiltrated the other rooms in the house. Agnes complained of the intrusion: "This is decidedly the very worst house I know to have a headache

---

<sup>5</sup> The siblings were John M. C. (1854-1905), George H. (1855-1878) - both children of John Brookes Johnston's first wife, Annette Cramsie; Henry 'Harry' Hamilton (1858-1927), Agnes (1859-1895), Leonard Purcell (1861-1936), Lilian (1863-1947), Philip Mainwaring (1865-1936), Annette (1867-1965), Percy Dove (1869-1949), Esther Angela (1870-1954), Louise 'Loulou' Mary (1871-date of death unknown), Mary Rose (1873-1931), Mabel (1874-1963), Alexander (1877-1975) - all children of his second wife Esther Laetitia Hamilton.

<sup>6</sup> Agnes died in childbirth on 27 October 1895. By this time, Agnes' sister Louisa had travelled to India to help her sister take care of a baby daughter, and would later become William Yule's second wife.

<sup>7</sup> Diana Poulton trained as an artist but, through her mother's friendship with Dolmetsch and the Dolmetsch family, took up the lute upon which she became an authority. Her painting 'Portrait of a Young Man Wearing a Shirt and a Waistcoat' is in the UCL Art Museum.  
<https://artuk.org/discover/artists/kibblewhite-diana-b-1903>

<sup>8</sup> The Church of Christ the King, Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, London was built for the Catholic Apostolic Church, known in England and America as Irvingites or Sandemanians. Members were instituted by the laying on of hands.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, Mabel's eyes were sea-blue, as were those of her daughter Nathalie, and Nathalie's daughters, Louise and Tesa.

in.” In October 1894, Mabel’s father writes to Agnes: “Louisa and Mabel are getting on well with their Mandelins [sic] and we have frequent evening concerts. They are still taking lessons.”

In her biography of Arnold Dolmetsch, Mabel explains how she came to be drawn into his exotic circle.<sup>10</sup>

In search of a violin teacher, she was recommended by a friend to approach Dolmetsch. The friend had recently left Dulwich College where Dolmetsch had taught the violin. She wrote to Dolmetsch’s address in Dulwich in June 1896. By then however, he had moved to Keppel Street, Bloomsbury, and had dispensed with most of his teaching. Even so, he agreed to take her on. Mabel probably travelled between Kennington and Bloomsbury on the recently completed underground railway about which Agnes wrote, of an earlier trip, “... it isn’t very pleasant travelling on the underground railway alone. Perhaps at the last minute I shall be able to persuade Mabel to go.”

The lessons gave her an intriguing glimpse of his household, with ‘their voluble French, interspersed with shrieks of laughter.’ She met H  l  ne, Dolmetsch’s oldest daughter, and   lodie Desir  e, formerly married to Arnold’s brother Edgard.<sup>11</sup>

She was invited to one of Dolmetsch’s London concerts and, booking three seats, went with a musical sister (probably Lilian) and the ‘indispensable chaperone’. That role was to be assumed by Lucy Carr Shaw who had married a Johnston cousin, Charles Robert Butterfield.<sup>12 13</sup> When she was asked to accompany them, Lucy exclaimed: ‘What! You mean Dolmetsch? Of course I will! George is crazy about him!’<sup>14</sup>

Of their performances, Mabel wrote: “All three were of a size, black-haired and dark-eyed; and their diversity of gifts acted as a foil each to the other.” She was struck greatly by the ‘suave beauty of H  l  ne’s bowing on the viola da gamba, the movement of her wrist calling in mind those of a swan’s neck.’ Taking lessons from H  l  ne, and as photographs show, Mabel learned well how to maintain a flexible bowing arm and wrist.

Mabel assisted in the workshop with preparation of the key-fronts for the ‘Green’ harpsichord begun in Dulwich at William Morris’ suggestion. It was

---

<sup>10</sup> Mabel Dolmetsch, ‘Personal Recollection of Arnold Dolmetsch’ published in 1957 by Routledge & Kegan Paul.

<sup>11</sup>   lodie Desir  e lived with Arnold before they married. Bearing her former husband’s surname most were unaware they were not husband and wife. On hearing they had married in Zurich on 11 September 1899, Shaw jested that had he known earlier he might have married   lodie himself.

<sup>12</sup> Mabel’s aunt Sarah Johnston had married Robert Butterfield. Mabel’s sister, Esther, married Kenneth Butterfield, and Mabel’s half-brother George had been engaged to Gertrude Butterfield but died at the age of 21.

<sup>13</sup> Lucy Carr Shaw, who sang in Carl Rosa Company and for D’Oyly Carte, was booked to sing in a Dolmetsch concert on 5 November 1897, but it was postponed to 9 November owing to the death of the Duchess of Teck. She then sang in a number of later Dolmetsch London concerts.

<sup>14</sup> Lucy’s brother was George Bernard Shaw, the Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist who supported and encouraged Dolmetsch in his work as both instrument maker and performer.

being rushed to completion for the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition. Helen Coombe complained to her fiancée, Roger Fry, that she was being held a prisoner 'in the manner of the Italian Popes' to work on the instrument's interior decoration. Even with contributions from Selwyn Image, who did the lettering, and Herbert Horne, who worked the design above the keyboard, time ran out to complete the exterior. A coat of green lacquer was applied in the hope that something more decorative might be applied later – which never was.

In a concert held at 7 Bayley Street, on Friday 3 December 1897, Mabel Johnston first appeared in a consort of viols. Alfonso Ferrabosco's 'The Dovehouse Pavan' opened the programme. Ensuing concerts show Mabel as a regular consort member performing in works for five and six viols by composers such as Deering (1898), Weelkes (1898, 1899), Mico (1898), Peerson (1898, 1899), Allegri (1898), Purcell (1898) and Leatherland (1899). In 1899, Mabel made her first appearance on the violone, and in December 1899 on the tenor viol. The latter concert was the first to feature Violet Gordon Woodhouse. She joined Élodie and Arnold in a performance of Bach's Concerto in C major for three harpsichords. In 1901, a Byrd 6-part fantasy, an anthem "This is the record of John" by Gibbons for five viols and five voices, and a 4-part suite by Locke illustrate the rich variety of early English music offered up to his enthusiastic audiences.

In March 1901, Mabel appears for the first time as a harpsichordist in an aria from a Bach Cantata. Her role as harpsichordist became more ambitious over the next few years, while she continued to play the bass and tenor viols (and later, the treble), while performing on the violone in larger works.

Hélène last performed in a Dolmetsch London concert in December 1901. A falling out between father and daughter led to two decades of misunderstanding and estrangement. Élodie's last appearance took place on 31 March 1903. She and Dolmetsch separated and divorced. The divorce cost Dolmetsch a splendid Kirkman harpsichord which he greatly regretted.<sup>15</sup>

When Dolmetsch wrote to Bernard Shaw about his divorce, the reply was typically Shavian: "What is the use of going to all that trouble? In another month you will be snapped up again: and the chances are that the new one will be possessed of seven devils for every one that possessed the other. Much better marry Elodie again: she was no worse than the other woman."<sup>16</sup>

Dolmetsch married his young protégée, Mabel Johnston, at Marylebone Town Hall on 23 September 1903. By this time, both her parents had died, and any objections from her family did not dissuade her. In March 1904, Mabel gave birth to the first of their four children, Cécile, who was left with a family friend

---

<sup>15</sup> After her divorce from Arnold Dolmetsch, Élodie Desirée reverted to her maiden name Lelong and established a successful career performing on piano and harpsichord in Great Britain, Ireland and France. She also toured South America with the American serpentine dancer, Loïe Fuller (1862-1928).

<sup>16</sup> The 'other woman' is Marie, Dolmetsch's first wife and mother of Hélène. After her divorce she moved to a small house in Steatham, taking her fifteen-year-old daughter with her.

while she and Arnold toured the U.S.<sup>17</sup> This was when the set of photographs by Oscar Maurer were taken. A second daughter, Nathalie, was born in July 1905, in Cook County, Chicago.<sup>18</sup> In the winter of 1905, Dolmetsch signed a contract with Chickering's of Boston to direct a new early musical instrument department. The family was initially based in Boston, but in April 1906, they moved to 16 Arlington Street, Cambridge, where, on 8 November 1906, their third child, a son Rudolph, was born.

The period before the move to Boston found Mabel Dolmetsch in Chicago fashioning clothes for Cécile and awaiting the arrival of a second child, Nathalie, 'interspersed with the study of new pieces for the viola da gamba.'<sup>19</sup> She, Arnold Dolmetsch, and the harpsichordist Kathleen Salmon had been providing music for Shakespeare's plays directed by Ben Greet and giving concerts throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Once established in Boston, Dolmetsch began work on a new design of double-manual harpsichord inspired by the 'French' instrument he acquired in Paris in 1903 to replace his Kirkman.<sup>20</sup> That acquisition followed an abortive trip to provide music for an Isadore Duncan dance production. In November 1906, Mabel gave birth to her first son, Rudolph. He was baptized in an old church in Boston and held at the font by the actress Florence Farr, an old family friend.<sup>21</sup>

During the five years spent at Chickering, Dolmetsch supervised the production of nine viols - three trebles, three tenors, and three basses. Several bear the heads of members of his family, including one, known as the 'Boston' tenor, with the image of Arnold Dolmetsch.<sup>22 23</sup>

The whirlwind of concerts had subsided, although not completely abated. Chickering allowed Dolmetsch to accept concert engagements and generously sponsored annual concert series at the Chickering Hall. Each commenced with a Christmas concert that featured Corelli's Christmas Concerto and Bach's Christmas Oratorio. The Boston Symphony Orchestra provided additional performers, some at great expense, and Mabel played the violone.

Mabel entertained guests at the Dolmetsch home in Cambridge, Mass. Mabel writes of one, Ferruccio Busoni, the Italian composer, pianist, conductor, editor, writer, and teacher: '[he] reminded me of how I had once played to him on an enormous instrument (the violone); and then turned with interest tinged with

---

<sup>17</sup> Cécile Dolmetsch (1904-1997) became the fourth President of the Viola da Gamba Society in 1989.

<sup>18</sup> Nathalie Dolmetsch (1905-1989) was founder and third President of the Viola da Gamba Society (1975-1989); her mother Mabel who was the Society's first President (1948-1963).

<sup>19</sup> The new baby was Nathalie Dolmetsch.

<sup>20</sup> The 'French' instrument is the Jean Goerman/Taskin French double now part of the Russell Collection in Edinburgh.

<sup>21</sup> Farr was the muse of the poet W.B. Yeats and became proficient on her Dolmetsch psaltery which she used to accompany her recitations.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas G. MacCracken has written about the Dolmetsch-Chickering viols in the *Journal of the Viola da Gamba Society of America*. 2013/2014, Vol. 48, p25-66. 42p.

<sup>23</sup> The 'Boston' tenor is currently owned by Marguerite Dolmetsch.

humour, as though examining some outmoded object, towards Arnold's latest achievement, the fourth 'Beethoven piano'.<sup>24</sup>

During their American sojourn, the Dolmetsch family also welcomed the American-born serpentine dancer Loïe Fuller. Mabel recounts the dancer's visit with her cast of dancers that included a troupe of 'pretty little children with the inherent charm of frisking young lambkins.' In earlier times, in France, the young Isadora Duncan had been part of Fuller's troupe. It was Fuller's fate to be in a permanent state of financial embarrassment so that her tours often ended with her deeply out of pocket and with members of her troupe unpaid. This misfortune happened to Élodie, Dolmetsch's second wife, who had accompanied Fuller on a tour of South America in 1904.

Once completed, the house Dolmetsch commissioned for 11 Elmwood Avenue hosted his 'Concerts of Intimate Music' which attracted a 'receptive and inspiring' audience'. Dolmetsch directed programmes like those he had promoted in Dulwich and London, including consorts for viols. Dolmetsch's elation at their good fortune is captured in an August 1910 letter to his old friend Selwyn Image, now Slade Professor of Art: "We have prospered well. We have three delightful children and a nice house, good garden, brilliant birds and lots of butterflies the size of this paper."

In December 1908, an invitation arrived from President Theodore Roosevelt to Arnold and Mabel to take tea at the White House and to play on one of the new Chickering clavichords. Roosevelt knew of Mabel's brother, Sir Harry Johnston, and later Johnston's work in East Africa led to an invitation from Roosevelt to stay at the White House to discuss political and environmental issues with which Roosevelt was concerning himself, including British plans to set aside wilderness areas as game reserves.<sup>25</sup>

It was in America in 1911 that Arnold Dolmetsch first included a recorder in his concerts, a Bressan treble that he had acquired in England that had formerly belonged to the Oxford antiquarian T. W. Taphouse.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Dolmetsch made three 'Beethoven pianos' in London, for Stewart Headlam, Violet Gordon-Woodhouse, and Cecil Rhodes. The Headlam instrument is now at the Horniman Museum. The fate of the 'fourth' is not known.

<sup>25</sup> Alex Johnston wrote: "So far as I know, Harry [Sir Harry] was the only man who dared tell his brother-in-law, Arnold Dolmetsch, that he preferred Gilbert and Sullivan opera to the supreme English composers of the Sixteenth Century, and a piano to a harpsichord." *The Life & Letters of Sir Harry Johnston*, pub. Jonathan Cape, 1929.

<sup>26</sup> Dolmetsch paid £2 for the recorder of boxwood and ivory, described as by Barton, but in fact made between 1701 and 1725 by Peter Bressan. This treble recorder featured first in a series of lectures at the Harvard University Fogg Museum in early 1911, when the performer was a Dolmetsch pupil, anthropologist Professor Francis Greenwood Peabody. Dolmetsch first played the instrument in a concert at Clifford's Inn, London on 27 February 1911. He apologised to the audience for his 'scant skill.' Recent research published in the *Bulletin of The Dolmetsch Foundation* suggests that Dolmetsch did not take possession of 'The Compleat Flute-Master OR The whole Art of playing on ye Rechorder', (which was acquired for 32/- on his behalf by Beatrice Horne in the later 1/2 July 1905 auction of Taphouse's books) until 20 October 1910. This might explain why the recorder did not appear in earlier concerts. Beatrice Horne was a regular member of the Dolmetsch viol consort in the decade before Dolmetsch's departure to work at Chickering in America. Another viol consort member, W. Howard Head, acquired a recorder in ivory and gilt-back tortoiseshell. That instrument had been owned by Sir

By 1910, a downturn in the U.S. economy and growing interest from the Parisian musical instrument-making industry led the family to move to France. Dolmetsch was to direct early keyboard instrument making at the French piano-maker, Gaveau. They sailed for France on 29 March 1911. The French governess, Mademoiselle Gaisser, reported that the entire move went without a hitch, Mrs. Dolmetsch remaining cheerful and calm throughout. Margaret Campbell comments: "quite an achievement for a woman with three small children at her skirts and another on the way."

For Arnold Dolmetsch, the move to France was a 'coming home', to somewhere more congenial than America where he felt he had been 'alone, preaching in the desert!' He did regret that they would miss their old house. He wrote to the new owner of his Cambridge house, English-born Simon Marks: "However we are quite happy here [in 3 rue de l'Audience, Fontenay-sous-Bois], we find that it is quite possible to do without electric light, bathroom, and ice cream, or even plain ice." On 23 August, their fourth child, Carl Frédéric, was born.

France offered old friends, and new ones. In the autumn of 1911, Dolmetsch met Dorothy Swainson who purchased a 5-octave clavichord.<sup>27</sup> She became an influential pioneer on the instrument.<sup>28</sup> She visited the 1930 Festival and remembered hearing Mabel performing 'Plainte' by Marin Marais on the bass viol. Later, Dorothy Swainson participated in post-war Haslemere Festivals, on harpsichord and clavichord, and edited the Dolmetsch Foundation's magazine, *The Consort*.<sup>29 30</sup>

Life in France included concerts, in which Mabel performed, but by early 1914, the economic problems that preceded the Great War led the family to move back to London where Dolmetsch took a house in Tanza Road which could provide space for a workshop.

A visit, towards the end of 1914, to Tanza Road by Ezra Pound, the American-born poet, and his American friend, the photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn, has left us a set of delightful photographs showing Mabel and her children dancing and performing on viols in the garden of the house. A young Carl can be seen peeping from under his mother's skirts, while she holds a bass viol.

---

John Frederick Bridge who had acquired it in the same June 1905 auction where Dolmetsch acquired the Bressan. The Bressan now forms part of the Dolmetsch Collection at the Horniman Museum.

<sup>27</sup> In her biography Swainson writes that an elderly lady purchased her 5-octave instrument (made in 1912-13) but that Raymond Russell later found it in a piano shop in Paris. Although he offered it to her she decided to purchase a 5-octave Dolmetsch-Chickering instrument which she kept until 1956.

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Swainson (1882-1959) trained as a pianist in Dresden and Paris. She was brought up in Germany, lived for a time in Florence and later in France. During an extended tour of Russia, that began in 1914, she became caught up in the Russian Revolution, but escaped through Finland to Sweden in 1918. Her cousin was Hilaire Belloc. She turned down his offer of marriage. She remained in France from 1939 to 1943, much of it in an internment camp in Vittel. She was repatriated to England via Sweden after reaching the age of 60.

<sup>29</sup> *The Consort* is the annual journal of The Dolmetsch Foundation Inc.

<sup>30</sup> Dorothy Swainson records, in 1943, "I went to Haslemere where dear Mabel Dolmetsch met me at the station and enquired most anxiously if by any chance I had any news of Rudolph [Dolmetsch] who was missing (it was two years before they knew definitely that his ship had been torpedoed)."

After his first visit Pound wrote: "I found myself in a reconstructed century - in a century of music, back before Mozart or Purcell, listening to clear music, to tones clear as brown amber. And this music came indifferently out of the harpsichord or the clavichord or out of virginals or out of odd-shaped viols, or whatever they may be. There were two small girls playing upon them with an exquisite precision ... one steps into a past era when one sees all the other Dolmetsches dancing quaint, ancient steps of sixteenth-century dancing. One feels that the dance would go on even if there were no audience." <sup>31</sup>

A few months later, Pound accompanied T S Eliot to Tanza Road. On 2 February 1915, Eliot wrote to Pound: "I passed one of the most delightful afternoons I have ever spent in one of the most delightful households I have ever visited. You were quite right - there is no difficulty about the conversation, and I made friends with the extraordinary children in no time, and am wild to see them again." <sup>32</sup>

Mabel's interest in early dance entered Ezra Pound's plan for a College of Arts, based in London. He envisaged a faculty made up of French artist and sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, English artist and Vorticist Percy Wyndham-Lewis, American pianist Katherine Heyman, Kiev-born writer and translator John Cournot, English painter and Vorticist Edward Wadsworth, Arnold Dolmetsch, French-born magazine illustrator Edmund Dulac, Alvin Langdon Coburn and Pound himself. Mabel Dolmetsch would teach early dance.

The plan was announced by Pound on 1 November 1914, and leaflets, printed at the Complete Press in London, were distributed towards the end of the month. Pound hoped to attract American students who, because of war, could no longer study in Europe. The college was to offer them 'contact with artists of established position, creative minds, men for the most part who have already suffered in the cause of their art.' But the war, that promised so many opportunities, became the source of insurmountable obstacles and the college was abandoned without progressing beyond the articles, the press-releases, and the leaflets.

The Tanza Road period saw Dolmetsch reestablish instrument production, albeit, on a much smaller scale than that at Chickering or Gaveau. Mabel decorated many of the soundboards of the keyboard instruments, the supplement charged helping to increase the margin of profit. <sup>33</sup> The family continued the concert

---

<sup>31</sup> W. B. Yeats gifted the price of a Dolmetsch clavichord to newly-weds Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear, who were married on 20 April 1914. Dorothy responded to Yeats on 30 April 1914: "We hope it will flower into deathless music - at least into an image of more gracious & stately times." Ronald Schuchard recounts in his book, 'The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts', Pound's meeting with Dolmetsch, accompanied by Coburn: "Though he [Pound] had anticipated a meeting with Dolmetsch for years, especially after ordering the clavichord, Pound was not prepared for the immediate and lasting fascination that the meeting would hold for him."

<sup>32</sup> Eliot would be an enthusiastic supporter and signatory of Shaw's 1938 letter requesting a Civil List Pension for Arnold Dolmetsch.

<sup>33</sup> In 1944, Swainson was looking out for a Dolmetsch clavichord, her French-based instruments having been lost to her. The instrument she found had been on loan to Max Rostal and the soundboard had been painted with some flowers by Mabel Dolmetsch when it was made in 1925. Mabel told her that she painted spring flowers in the spring and autumn flowers in the autumn.

giving, travelling the length of the country, but the threat from German Zeppelins who had begun bombing London, led the family to move to Thursley and, after a few months, to 'Jesses' in Haslemere, Surrey.

There they established contact with Mr. and Mrs. Joseph King, the Godfrey Blounts and others involved in Arts & Crafts and Peasant Arts projects in the area. A flourishing workshop was soon busy producing clavichords, spinets, harpsichords: later to include viols, violins, rebecs, lutes, vihuelas, and recorders.

The loss of the precious Bressan recorder after a concert in London in 1919 led Dolmetsch to design, research and finally produce his first modern recorders, which formed the core of Dolmetsch instrument-making through to the early twenty-first century.

In 1925, the first Haslemere Festival took place, and a Foundation was set up to support Arnold Dolmetsch in his work, and to encourage scholars to come to Haslemere to study with him. The first recipients were the American John Challis, who went on to become an influential harpsichord maker, and Elizabeth Brown, who came to study the violin with Dolmetsch. She eventually married one of the Dolmetsch craftman, Robert Goble, who went on to establish a harpsichord-making workshop near Oxford. The musicologist Robert Donington became Arnold Dolmetsch's assistant and edited early editions of *The Consort*.

Mabel and Arnold also became interested in Bardic harp music. Mabel made a series of pioneer recordings in the 1930s of Irish and Welsh harp music.<sup>34 35</sup> Arnold Dolmetsch died in 1940 and, while family members left to marry, Mabel continued to live at Jesses, only a short distance from 'Beechside'. This large Victorian house was home to a greatly expanded workshop, now also producing plastic recorders that were exported to all parts of the world. Annual workshop parties of the period show 40 or more staff together with Mabel and her children and grandchildren in the Studio at 'Jesses'. Mabel continued to narrate the programmes of historical dance that were a feature of each annual Haslemere Festival until shortly before her death in 1963.

*The author, Dr. Brian Blood, is married to Marguerite Dolmetsch, younger twin-daughter of Dr. Carl Dolmetsch. Brian joined the Dolmetsch recorder consort in the late 1960s. After retiring from academic life in Oxford as a cardiac physiologist, he directed the Dolmetsch Musical Instruments firm until it closed in 2010. He is Honorary President of the Southern Early Music Forum and a governor of The Dolmetsch Foundation.*

---

<sup>34</sup> "...the small, metal-strung variety, favoured in Ireland, and the Highlands of Scotland, under the name of Clarsach. I never ceased to thank him [Arnold] for producing these most fascinating of instruments, whose suavely tuneful music rejoices the heart and charms the senses. One day when I was recreating myself with one of these little instruments, a neighbour who had asked if she might use our telephone, came running into the music room, exclaiming: 'Oh, what are those lovely sounds? That is the kind of music I want to hear when I am dying!'" from Mabel Dolmetsch's Personal Recollections.

<sup>35</sup> See also: <http://www.earlygaelicharp.info/Dolmetsch/irish.htm>

