

BEAUCHAMP HOUSE EARLY MUSIC SUMMER SCHOOL

Twenty-four years ago Alan and Caroline Lumsden began a series of summer courses in the outbuildings of their old farmhouse on the A40 a couple of miles west of Gloucester, with students camping on an adjoining field. Most of the courses were for children, but a week was devoted to early music with an adult clientele. Apart from a brief visit a few years earlier, I have been involved for a dozen years. The main tutors are Alan himself and Philip Thorby. Alan began his musical career as a trombonist, but was interested in early instruments and became a member of David Munrow's Early Music Consort. (Some older readers might also remember the London Serpent Trio.) His Summer School is unique because of the presence of a considerable number of cornetts and sackbuts, the standard companion to choirs in the decades around 1600. Viols and violins are also welcome, and recorder players who can also sing. The attraction for singers is the opportunity to experience new repertoire and to try familiar pieces in unfamiliar and exciting new ways.

Alan is now retired and lives in France (with the consequence that the local cider is now supplemented by wine!). He spends much of his time selecting and typesetting fresh music for the Summer School, which still takes place at his former home. Each year there is a theme, generally one that emphasises the polychoral repertoire. With roughly 50 people attending, pieces for three or four choirs are no problem, and there is the chance to experiment with a variety of mixed vocal and instrumental scorings. Weeks have been devoted to Palestrina, Gabrieli, Praetorius, Schütz (one year also with Scheidt and Schein), music from Mantua, from Spain & hispanic America; in 2009 we will explore music from Eastern Europe. Alan and Philip share the direction of the full sessions; Alan spends further time with the players while Philip concentrates on the singers. My role is to sit at the organ, and also to offer advice to budding continuo players.

The main activity takes place in a specially-built hall with ample space for performance and dining, with a kitchen capable of providing excellent food (and suitably skilled staff), and with showers for the campers. There are also B&Bs within a few miles. Musically and socially, I find it immensely stimulating. The surrounding countryside invites walking (there is time before breakfast or after lunch).

Clifford Bartlett

The 2009 course runs from Sunday 19 July dinner (6.00 pm) to Friday 24 July 9.30 pm (Saturday breakfast available to campers).

Details from Anne Ingram: holidaycourses@gamusic.co.uk or visit the website www.gamusic.co.uk.