

## NWEMF Summer School at Ambleside July 2007

Although this was the 25th NWEMF Summer School it was the first time that I had attended it. St. Martin's College is on a hilly site and comprises the curiously-named, "Scale How" building, with refectory and a few rooms, together with a number of locations such as the drama studio, the "Barn" and "Hill Top" (thankfully somewhat inaccurately named, but a brisk 5 minute's walk away up hill). A few signposts would have been useful but after studying the map a few times the mists in my understanding cleared. The same cannot be said of the rain which for most days was falling in plenty so that my elderly umbrella had to be pensioned off at the end of the week.

The timetable was easily the fullest of any course I know. After breakfast there were warm-ups, the one for singers being entertainingly led by Deborah Catterall. Then there was an hour and a half session for viols, recorders or, in my case, voices with the same tutor each day. Clive Walkley was the original course director and this was the last year at which he will be a tutor so I was fortunate to have the benefit of his tuition - imagine a musical Alan Bennett. After coffee there were mixed consorts, at which I mostly sang as there was the usual shortage of low voices. Following lunch there was an optional session but as this was my chance to play the cornett I chose to do so. After tea there was usually a lecture-recital such as one on the broken consort, another on the life of a maestro de capilla and one drawing on a Scottish teenage lady's lute book given by Martin Eastwell and others. Then after a good supper we all trooped up to Hilltop to take part in polychoral music, or on one evening some dancing ably led by Elizabeth Dodd.

You might think that at this point we would all repair to the bar, and you would be right but at 10 p.m. our indefatigable course director, Roger Wilkes, led a group of more than 30 of us in singing till 11 p.m. The standard of sight-singing was excellent and we usually managed an acceptable performance on the second run of each piece, even though we were sitting in random order. This was one of the most satisfying aspects of the course, though it did mean being pretty tired by the time one got to bed.

On the final evening there was a banquet for a total of 90, including a few spouses and partners. This was enlivened by a multitude of short pieces involving most of the course participants and culminating in a spoof version of "The Sound of Music" given by the "Young Singers" - a troop of girls under the direction of Deborah Catterall. This being Ambleside, there was then a three-hour madrigal session led by Roger, ending at 1 a.m.

The atmosphere at Ambleside is friendly, as are the tutors, who as well as those named earlier included Philip Guar (flute and recorder), Jonathan Morgan (flute, recorder and sackbut), Peter Syrus (voice) and Margaret Westlake (viol and other instruments). If you like to be kept busy, then this is the course for you.

David Fletcher