

Notes & Queries

A REGISTER OF EARLY REEDS: A BASSOON REED IN THE EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY COLLECTION

At the recent meeting of the Galpin Society and the American Musical Instrument Society in the United Kingdom in August 2003, I came across an original bassoon reed in the Edinburgh University Collection that warrants documentation in this journal. The reed, acquisition number 3600, (See Figure 1 below) was donated in 2001 by Maurice Checker who purchased it together with a bassoon by Milhouse. The total length of the reed is 57.6mm and the single band is placed 25.4mm from the reed tip. The width at the tip is 14.1mm and the width of the reed at the band is 10.6mm. The approximate length of the scrape is 22.5mm. (Reed measurements were taken by Arnold Myers of the Edinburgh University Collection.) At some point, the reed was crushed since it is almost flat at the single band and is cracked in several places. There is no name on the reed that I could detect, however a dried, black film covering the entire reed (including the inside) may be obscuring a maker's mark. The opening of the stock is cut in the form of a slight V where the two halves of the piece of cane were brought together. (This V-shaped groove in the stock was a popular technique of nineteenth-century reed makers in the United Kingdom.) There are two aspects of the construction of this reed that make it significant: the scrape and the binding system.

The reed is scraped in the typical late 18th- and early 19th-century manner described in Ozi, *Nouvelle Méthode de Bassoon* (1803) on page 144 in the 'Indication sur la Manière de Faire les Anches'. (I call this the *en biseau* scrape, to differentiate it from the

modern bassoon reed scrape. Today, this manner of scraping is sometimes referred to as the *short scrape*.) This reed is also typical of reeds from this period in that when scraped, the bark was not removed entirely from the vibrating area of the reed blade. The fact that this reed is scraped in this manner is significant since a reed made with *en biseau* scrape implies that the reed was also made using a tapered gouge.

The reed is bound together with only one band, of about 1.5mm in width. There are no other wires or bands that I could detect, and only the string wrapping binds the tube and stock of the reed together. The fact that this reed is bound together with a single solid band is significant. According to my research, this system of binding the reed together with only one band or wire was used in the United Kingdom and France. In France, the primary sources show that this single binding system was used in the 18th century and abandoned in the early 19th century. However, in the United Kingdom, a system of binding the reed with a single solid band was popular well into the 19th century. The tube of the reed is bound tightly with gray cotton thread that has been treated with what seems to be beeswax.

Because of the single band and V-shaped groove in the stock I believe that this reed was made in the United Kingdom sometime in the late 18th to the early 19th century. There are not many extant original bassoon reeds from this period, therefore this reed is important and deserves further study.

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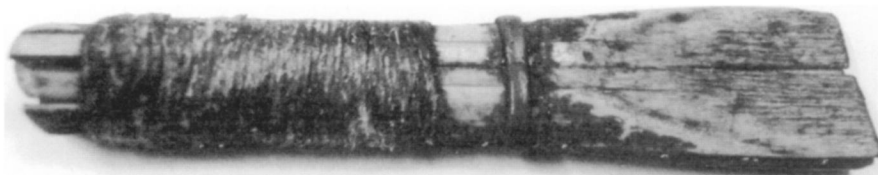


Figure 1. Late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century bassoon reed from the Edinburgh University Collection of Historical Musical Instruments. Acquisition number 3600, gift of Maurice Checker 2001. Photo courtesy of EUCHML