

HARP NOTES

Newsletter of the Australian Therapeutic Harpists Association

Calendar of Events

ATHA

Wishing everyone a safe and happy festive season, and an exciting and inspired 2025!

Tune a Month

- Meets online first Tuesday evening of each month.

ATHA Discussion Group

- Meets online third Tuesday evening of each month.

National Therapeutic Harp Gathering

National Therapeutic Harp Gathering – Portarlinton.
13th – 15th June 2025.

Please send through all 2025 events!



Welcome to the Summer edition of the ATHA newsletter, heralding the end of 2024. Once again, we have a newsletter full of interesting and exciting content.

I'd like to give a big thanks to all contributors for sharing your thoughts and experiences. I do actually enjoy putting together each edition (even if I do sometimes mutter a few profanities 😊).

I'd also like to thank my fellow committee members, Catherine, Christine, Jenni and Helen, for their constancy.

And a big shout-out to Brandden who consistently provides helpful and informative advice in each and every Workbench article.

Wishing you all a wonderful festive season, and look forward to receiving your many and varied articles in 2025.

Cheers and go well. Glenda harptranquility@gmail.com

President's Report

Dear members,

Thank you for your ongoing support of ATHA this year.

At the 2023 AGM, Committee member, Lyn Johnson, stepped down from a committee member role. We then welcomed Helen Punch. Helen has long been a part of the Harp Society of Western Australia and is now the Society's Vice President. Thank you, Helen, for your input over the past year.

Our 2024 AGM was well attended and saw all other committee members returned to their positions. Myself as President, Glenda Underhill as Vice President, Jenni Sawell as Secretary, Christine Middleton as Treasurer, and newly elected committee member, Jenny Burchill. Welcome Jenny. I'm sure you'll be a great contributor.

Glenda Underhill has done a very fine job of compiling and editing the newsletter this year. It is a huge job. Glenda has produced a high-quality document each season. Thank you, Glenda, and thank you to all of the people who have contributed from states around Australia. It is very generous of you to take the time and share your knowledge and experiences.

Thank you to Nicky Lock, who has continued to add interesting posts to ATHA's Facebook page, the Australian Therapeutic Harp Community. Thank you to the other people who have taken the time to share their thoughts and stories of interest.

ATHA has continued to run Tune-a-Month and Discussion Group sessions via Zoom each month. Thank you to Christine Middleton for chasing down presenters and facilitating the Tune-a-Month sessions, and Carol Booth for connecting all of us so we can share and discuss issues, opportunities, and ideas, in the Discussion Group. Thank you very much to all of the presenters who contributed over the last year.

Earlier this year, ATHA donated \$300 to Victorian Harpist, Mary Doumany's two projects; the transcription of multi-movement work, 'Alice in Freefall', for piano and harp; and the writing of 'The Pillars of the Temple' for harp and string quartet. We were made aware of Mary's diagnosis of ovarian cancer. Our thoughts are with her, and we wish her all the best.

ATHA is currently working on plans for a National Therapeutic Harp Gathering in, or close to, Portarlinton in Victoria from the 13th to 15th of June 2025. We will hold a series of workshops and make sure there is time for harpists to meet and network. Stay tuned for updates about this event and thank you to Christine for taking the lead with planning.

We're looking forward to continuing to connect and help therapeutic harpists in the coming year. Thank you to the committee for your ongoing commitment and thank you to the members for being a part of it all!

Kind regards,

Catherine Lyons-Nash

News from our Members

from New South Wales

Nicky Lock

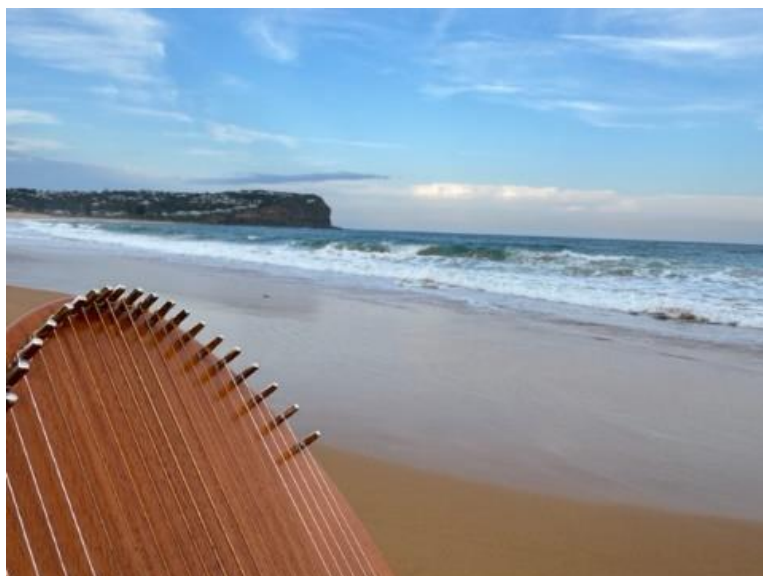
Supermoons, Sand, Sound therapy and Self Care weekend

Due to illness, we were a smaller bunch than expected who gathered at MacMasters Beach on the weekend of October 19/20 for our self-care retreat, but a relaxing, learning and refreshing time was had by all.

We enjoyed some good home cooked food, watching the stunning king parrots visiting for their food, and a brilliant supermoon at night.



All taking our small harps to the beach caused some amusement for local beach walkers, but we all loved the freedom of playing along with the waves and experimenting with sounds we could coax from the harps as they vibrated to the ocean breezes.



Saturday morning, we were joined by Ruth Cunningham, sound practitioner and healer from New York, who taught us about doing vocal toning accompanied with simple modal patterns on our harps for our own self care and for doing therapy work with those we play for.

Some of the things we looked at with Ruth:

- Using the Pentatonic scales starting on C, F or G
- Humming JUST ON ONE NOTE for up to 15mins, using the breath so when naturally come to the end of one breath, take a deep breath in and return to the same note.
- “Noodling” around a simple triad to improvise. E.g. in D Dorian, use DEFA in right hand, 1:5:8:9 in left hand.
- Remembering we are all “melody makers” and can write simple songs by taking just a short phrase or poem and make up a simple tune.
- A good mantra for humming meditation is Julian of Norwich “All Shall be Well” phrase.



We spent the rest of the weekend workshopping some of Ruth’s material with Jenni Sawell’s guidance, eating chocolate and relaxing on the deck!

Thanks Anne, Jenni and Lara-May – you were all great retreat companions!

From NSW

Anne Horton

Harpkeepers Book Club

Summary of most recent Harpkeepers' Book Club:

On the 5th December we met with author Sarah Jones to discuss, **"Dementia, who are you and what have you done with my mother?"**

It was a very interesting, enjoyable and stimulating conversation as we discussed how our harp playing (in a variety of settings) can be influenced (helped or hindered) by such things as:

1. A sense of humour
2. Journaling our experiences
3. Playing for people with a hearing loss
4. Keeping our emotions in check
5. Being prepared (eg: learn about dementia before playing for people who have dementia)
6. Flexibility
7. Obligation
8. Guilt
9. Faith

... and more ... concluding, **"LOVE is the CODE that DISARMS THE BOMB"**.

What a great thing to remember as we encounter various challenges in life that lie ahead, particularly during the busy Christmas season we are entering.

Future of Harpkeepers' Book Club

First a brief look back. We have had an interesting history so far, starting off meeting weekly (July 2021) reading "This is Your Brain on Music" by Daniel Levitin.

Our numbers grew steadily (a lot of us were isolated in lock down at this time). Once the intensity of that time eased, we moved to monthly meetings, then quarterly.

Now I am announcing that we will operate on an "ad hoc" basis. I anticipate this will mean meeting **approximately twice a year**, but I am not specifying any dates at this time.

I will give you plenty of advance notice (probably about 2 months notice). So, if you come across an absolutely *fabulous* book ... and even better still, if you are able to invite the author to join us, please let me know. Someone suggested a harpist's/harper's (auto)biography would be great - I agree - any of you up for writing one?!

I absolutely love meeting with everyone, and look forward to 2025. In the meantime, I hope you have many happy, harp-filled days ...

Louise Bell

My Christmas offering

Silent Night

Arr. Louise Bell

[Reharmonised]

Franz Gruber

Musical notation for measures 1-6. The piece is in 3/4 time. Measure 1 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. A crescendo (*cresc.*) is indicated over measures 2-4. Measure 5 begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various note values and rests.

Musical notation for measures 7-12. Measure 7 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various note values and rests.

Musical notation for measures 13-19. Measure 13 starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. A mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic is indicated for measure 15. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various note values and rests.

Musical notation for measures 20-26. Measure 20 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. A mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic is indicated for measure 22. A mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic is indicated for measure 24. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various note values and rests.

Musical notation for measures 27-32. Measure 27 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. A ritardando (*rit.*) is indicated for measure 29. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various note values and rests.

from Queensland

Rae Lloyd-Jones

Thank you

Hi Everyone

I would just like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in the AHTA Community for your support and encouragement over the last year and a half, since I began my THTP training. Based in far North Queensland, being relatively new to Harp, and sort of self-taught, I am a long way from any other Harpers. So, the connection to all of you through internet and the AHTA has just been the biggest of blessings to me.

I have gleaned so much from all of you during the monthly Discussion Groups and Tune-A-Month sessions that I have been able to zoom into, as well as the remote sessions for the THTP Course Students.

Isn't that just a wonderful thing that came out of the Covid-year: Zoom Meetings! 😊

Thank you all!

from Tasmania

Helen Morrison

Remembering Andrew Thom – Tasmanian Harp Maker

It was with much sadness that the harp community learned of the passing of the brilliant Tasmanian harp maker Andrew Thom in early September 2024. Andrew is well known around the world for his unique, well-designed and beautifully resonant lever harps, with their bright colours and distinctive style that are standouts in the harp field.

Andrew perfected his earlier harps using fibreglass and carbon-fibre reinforced Western Red Cedar soundboards. His later harps were completely made from carbon fibre, providing a lightweight, portable instrument, with the 29 string being a favourite of mine. Owners of Thom harps are fortunate to have a sturdy, long-lasting and beautiful instrument.



A few examples of Andrew's wonderful work – imagination and craftsmanship

I met Andrew Thom back in the early 2000's at one of the first Hobart harp gatherings hosted by newly-arrived harp teacher Susan King. Andrew came along to meet us, a group of mostly new students of Susan's. I remember that he was particularly taken by my cello that I had brought with me. Andrew sat down next to me and became quite animated about the possibility of harps and cello being played together. I'm not sure what music we played that day, but I know it was an auspicious meeting with Susan, Andrew and that fledgling core group of Tasmanian harpists.

(Some years later and after completing many harps, Andrew made a side trip into making cellos, again in his distinctive, colourful and unique style.



Andrew with one of his electric models

Soon after our meeting, Christina Baehr (née Sonnemann) started the Harp Society of Tasmania and Andrew began making harps in earnest. It was not long before I bought my first Thom harp, a sweet, portable Susan 19 with a distinctive floral upholstery-covered soundbox.

Over the years I have been fortunate to own several Thom harps, including my mainstays – a Rhonwen 32, an Elf 26 and an Adaryn 23. These wonderful harps have been played in music workshops, harp lessons, weddings and other special events.

Thom harps are portable and well received in all settings for their excellent tone and contemporary styling. Andrew was always generous with his time and ideas. A phone call to Andrew about a harp would often be a conversation that ended up 'reshaping the world'.



Andrew spray painting one of his creations



I was honoured to be asked to be part of a memorial ceremony for Andrew in mid-November 2024. It was held at the family property outside Cygnet, TAS, with close family and friends present. On this over-cast but fine afternoon we gathered at a large stone circle made decades ago by the family. These moss-covered dolerite stones spoke of ancient times and on closer inspection a yin and yang symbol emerged in a curved row of stones through the middle of the circle. This was the perfect location for the interment ceremony.

After the eulogy, where Deborah, his wife and their three grown sons all spoke of their love for Andrew, the fifty or so people present were asked to stand for a minute's silence around the edge of the circle. It was very special to be asked to play at this point, and I was positioned inside the circle with my little Adaryn 23 string harp. I improvised for a few minutes as a support for Deborah and those present, and as a thank you to Andrew for his years of friendship and craftsmanship.

What did I play? As I was setting up on a soft cushion of moss, I tuned into what I thought Andrew would want. I imagined that he didn't want anything flashy or with levers. I put all my levers down and improvised a gentle, thought-provoking piece in C minor. The sound of the harp lifted into the trees where the currawongs composed their own call and response. As you can imagine, it was an emotion-charged event filled with much love for Andrew and the family.



The afternoon flowed into the evening with sweet music by a guest band, and memories being shared amongst friends. Many family photos adorned the bush setting, giving an insight into Andrew's life.

A small stage was set up and I was asked to play one of Andrew's cellos, accompanied by his youngest son on drums. (The drumkit was also made by Andrew). A blues riff emerged on the cello as the drums beat out across the valley. A row of brightly coloured electric bass guitars, also made by Andrew, adorned the stage and perhaps they had their time to shine later in the evening.



It was a privilege to be a part of this fitting tribute, honouring Andrew Thom's life and legacy. He will be missed.



from South Australia

Lyn Johnson

I was recently holidaying in the UK; Ireland, England, Wales and Cornwall. To my surprise, nowhere did I see anyone playing a harp. Given that the Celtic harp is the national emblem of Ireland, which welcomed me to Ireland in the form of its image on the airport interior wall, the real harp wasn't to be seen anywhere in the country. I attended several Celtic music concerts and pub music nights and was exposed to wonderful folk music...but no harps in sight. I did however, see the famous Brian Boru harp on display at the Trinity College Dublin in Ireland. Maybe there's an opening for Australian harpists in Ireland ...



Brian Boru harp



An Irish session

For the past five years, the [Grab your reader's attention with a great quote from the document or use this space to emphasize a key point. To place this text box anywhere on the page, just drag it.]

South Australian government has run a two week Nature Festival, where it supports individuals or groups to run events that in some way connect the public to nature. I offered three mindfulness meditations accompanied by harp music in my local park amongst the gum trees. It was advertised through the Nature Festival website, where people could book through Humanitix; we also put notices on relevant Face Book pages, and signs in the park. There were a mix of those who booked, some of whom didn't show up, and others turned up without booking, having heard of it through other sources. Over the 3 sessions approximately 50 people attended. The weather was slightly on the cool side for the first session, the 2nd session was more comfortable, and the 3rd session was perfect weather, which enhanced the effect of meditating outside. As a result of several people asking for meditation in the park to continue, I am running a trial of four sessions till the end of December to gauge interest as to whether I will continue next year for the summer-autumn months.

from Victoria

Anke Arkestyne

My escapades

Hello fellow harpers.

Lately I am travelling more. The reason being, Christine Middleton had a great workshop and concert on in Port Arlington featuring Alice Giles. It was a fantastic day. She asked me to play when the audience came in for the concert.

I played for half an hour. It was packed. We had dinner with Alice who stayed overnight. Even Alice thought that having the workshop and concert in one day was a good experience and worked well. Thanks to Christine's organisational talent, it brought the community together.

The other reason for my travel was that my dearly beloved baby brother came over from Holland. He wanted to travel in Victoria and South Australia and find his luck in Gold. "Oh that is great" I said, "I have always been good at finding things." (I did not tell him I was only good at finding things that were lost).

Our first camp was in Slaty Creek near Castlemaine (or another place whose name I forgot). We met a Gold digger named Colin and he took my brother to his dig and showed the hard work you have to do to find a sliver of gold. We did not find gold, but it was more the fun and catching up with Colin.

I had my small harp with me and played near the campfire. My brother is a chef and soon the next camp neighbours turned up at dinner time...

Needless to say Vincent my brother, made many friends, one of which was called Neil.

Neil was an ex-fire brigade man suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. He could not go to sleep easily. So I lulled him to sleep with my harp and Vincent cooked lovely dinners! Neil ate with relish, himself a good bush cook, whose speciality was making and cooking damper. And he was an **experienced gold digger**. He said so, as he rattled three tiny gold pieces in his medicine jar.!!

He helped my brother Vincent look for gold with his detector. However, the detector was not fine tuned...seems to make a lot of difference...just like the harp!

Anyway we went everywhere in my opinion. Neil's expert eyes scanning the ground. With Neil's 4x4 parked in the middle of the bush, off we went. Quickly losing our bearings. It is an eerie feeling when you are in the middle of a cork-dry forest with nowhere a sign or find the way back to the car.

The call of Cooee came in handy several times. We again only found iron.

But the main thing was having fun. Back at camp we decided to go our separate ways. Neil had to go home to Ouyen, my brother wanted to go to the Grampians, and I wanted to go for the first time to Maldon Folk festival. I would perform with Harpers bizarre a lovely group of harpers led by Andy Rigby.



A few of the harpists enjoying some Andy Rigby wisdom

I arrived at Jill Findlay's place on Thursday morning, she was happy to see me and I was able to put my campervan down below in her garden.....

On Friday I went with her to set up stalls at the festival for the music makers – luthiers and flute makers.

On Saturday we had rehearsal upstairs in the fire station hall, for our concert at 6:00 pm in the Anglican church. There was a whole bunch of us. Something like 15 harpers and Alan on the flute and his girlfriend Ruth on violin, harp and concertina. It sounded terrific.

I thought I would be late for rehearsal because when I drove up the hill from Jill's property, my car got bogged and there was no way I could get on the road....

I rang RACV. They came within the hour to save the damsel in distress. Not without the unavoidable smirks and remarks that made the sunny day more delightful.

"I do all the work" said the RACV man called Bruce. "That sounds impressive" I said with a smile. The day was glorious and promised to be **paradise weather**. Not too hot, not too cold, and no wind...Bruce asked me to hop in my van and engage some gears and keep the brakes on till the pull was noticeable and that was the moment the brakes would be released. My 23 year old campervan creaks and moans a lot lately, sometimes she sounds like me, but this time she went out of the bog and over the nature strip onto the road without complaint...Hurray! I was in time for the rehearsal.

My little harp was a Godsend because It would have been impossible to camp with a big harp. The concert was a success. Next morning Jill, Pete, I and the brown famil, plus Shirely and Anna, and another girl, I forget her name, played in the Celtic Sunday Anglican Mass. Jill asked me to play a solo piece after the sermon.

First, we all played two pieces and then I started with Elogy. A piece I heard in 1984 in another church the composer is anonymous. You could hear a pin drop. No microphone needed because the softest whisper on the strings was heard far down the aisle. In contrast to the deafening loud music during the festival performances.

Jill told me later she was praying people would not clap because the whole piece was a prayer and calling up something the audience had never experienced before. The piece has suspended chords and that makes the harp sound like magic. The whole moment was magic and when the priest finally stood up after the last notes had died away long ago and their echo lingered in the rafters, he wished I had gone on forever! He did not want to break the spell the harp had just woven in that moment. Thank God nobody clapped.

After all my duties were done I decided to enjoy the festival and went to see the performance of the Nightingales. Clair Patty is a friend of mine and it was good to see each other. I reserved my seat in the front row so that I could see Clair playing harp and singing. I put my walking stick on the seat so no one dared to take it. That was NOT a good idea.....I went to get a Fanta drink at a nearby stall.

As I walked back to my seat with my Fanta a man bumped into me! My feet slipped on the very smooth gravel and I sank to the ground with my left leg buckling under me and my elbow taking the fall. The Fanta flew far away! BUMMER I thought when I fell, I am going to break my ankle. I fell in front of the first aid tent and when I lay on the gravel the girls from first aid lifted me up but I could not stand on my left foot I told them I had broken my big toe!!!!

I could sort of walk, more like a shuffle. After a while, I went to my car loaded all my gear, and drove three hours drive home. The next day, the xray told me, yes a broken big toe... I lucky not to have other things broken...only my big toe and a nasty elbow wound. Now I am hobbling around in a moonboot....

It was nevertheless a great festival!!!

Christine Middleton

Alice Giles' visit to Port Arlington

On Saturday 26th October 2024, the Bellarine Sea Angels hosted a wonderful day of Harp Workshop and Concert by the celebrated Alice Giles at the Portarlington Uniting Church.

Alice Giles is a world class harpist and an international touring and recording artist who has performed extensively across the USA, Europe and the UK. Described as a sensitive, intelligent and brilliant harpist, Alice was also the recipient of an Australian Antarctic Arts Fellowship.



Twenty-Eight harpists participated in the morning harp workshop featuring a lively round of “Triptic Dance” and “Suantraí Na Maighdine” with Alice concluding the morning with a very interesting talk on “Healthy Harp Playing” using the principles of Alexander Technique.

Workshop

Following a communal lunch in the church hall, we all moved across to the Church for a sold-out Concert. As the crowd arrived, we were all welcomed in for the afternoon to the lovely music provided by Anke Arkestyn. The Concert then commenced with a stunning performance by young local soprano and Windfire Choral Scholar at the Geelong Basilica, Zenaida Campion who was accompanied by Alice on harp. Alice went on to finish the first half of the program with fantastic solo performances by Grieg, Puccini, Handel, Mozart, Salzedo and a mesmerizing Suite "Water/Fire" composed by Mary Doumany.



Zenaida – soprano soloist



Jennifer Stephens (Harp) and Angie Smales (Zither), both members of the Bellarine Sea Angels, kicked off the second part of the concert with an entertaining mix of Blues, Jazz & Celtic Pieces.

Jennifer & Angie

Alice then continued with a special presentation of her time in the Antarctica.

Alice was the granddaughter of Cecil Madigan, geologist, Australian expeditioner and a member of Douglas Mawson's Australia Antarctic expedition 1911-1914 and she spoke about her grandfather, her music, and her trip to Antarctica where she performed at Mawson Station in 2011 commemorating the Centenary of the first Australasian Antarctic Expedition.



Alice's Antartic Presentation

Her presentation included magical Video Footage, Slides, Storytelling and solo Harp music. Highlights of her presentation included listening to the haunting sounds when the harp was “reacting” to the strong wind in the ice/snow and the video footage of penguins sliding around in the snow to Alice’s solo performance of “Billions of Penguins”. It was an amazing presentation with Alice receiving a well-deserved standing ovation at the conclusion. Everyone who came away on the day were moved and inspired.

Again, it was lovely to share the day with so many harpists including a number of ATHA members – Carla Whitely, Anke Arkestyn, Rachel Gellert, Gillian Turner, Deirdre Crawley, Angie Smales, Tanya Stewart, Trish Masin, Jenny Burchill, Gail Casey, Michelle Boughen, Sharon Meade, Ashael Schembri, Cathryn Chee, Crenagh Kelly, Andrea McVean, Jennifer Stephens, Kristine Fitzgerald.



Carla Whiteley



Rachel Gellert



Cathryn Chee

The Alice Giles’ Harp day was the last in a series of inspiring workshops and concerts brought to the Bellarine Peninsula by the Bellarine Sea Angels over the past two years – Helen Morrison, Christina Tourin, Rosemary Hallo, Josh Lane and Alice Giles.



Christine, Alice, Anke, Jennifer, Angie & Zenaida

Thanks once again to all the harpists that made the Harp days such a success by bringing plates of food to share, setting up the church and hall, manning the door, merchandise table, assisting other harpists to navigate the music during the workshops and their willingness to be supporting acts in the concert.

Harp Workbench

As a service to the subscribers of this newsletter, Brandden Lassells of Harps and Harps will answer questions you may have pertaining to the making, maintenance or repair of harps.

Question: *"I have an early 1800's Erard Grecian harp. Can I use "normal" pedal harp strings?"*

Reply: **A very definite no.**

The early Erard harps were designed with a much lighter string tension than modern pedal harps. To use "normal" pedal harp strings, i.e. those sold for modern pedal harps, you would risk doing serious damage to the harp. If the harp is a Grecian or earlier Ram's head or Empire style, it is too lightly built to withstand modern pedal harp strings. It was designed for light gauge strings, and modern strings could pull the column into a curve, break the soundboard, and entirely possibly break or bend the neck.

The sound will be much better with the lighter gauge strings, as this is what the harp was designed for. Not only do you risk pulling the poor harp apart, but you may also find it difficult or impossible to regulate with improper strings. The strings traditionally used would be light gauge gut in the upper ranges and wire wrapped silk in the base. If someone without knowledge about these harps has replaced the soundboard, the soundboard could now be too stiff for the properly designed strings, and therefore, the sound would be compromised. The soundboard might be able to withstand the extra tension but the rest of the harp will suffer.

The English Erards' were made like watches, with meticulous craftsmanship.

Properly restored and strung, they are delightful musical instruments. They are a true joy to play

By the way, it is common for the English-made Erard harps to have an inscription on the action. A serial number should be after the statement "Sebastien Erard Patent", which can be traced. With this number, the date of manufacture and the original customer can be determined. To the best of my knowledge, the English Erard company ceased manufacture sometime in the 1920s. According to the last employee, the French shop closed in the 1980's but had been reduced to repairs only for many years. I do not know of a record of harps produced from the French shop, but Mr. Morely has been kind enough to help many English Erard owners by providing information about their harps.

In conclusion, **Do Not use modern pedal gut strings on the early Erard harps.**

Questions and comments for future "Harp Workbench" column of this newsletter can be addressed to the editor, Glenda Underhill harptranquility@gmail.com or to Brandden. Brandden Lassells, the proprietor of Harps and Harps, home of the light weight all carbon fibre harps. Brandden can be contacted on (07) 4125 8393, 0419 692 286 or through his website www.harps.com.au