

May 2015 Meeting - Con Rendell, Luthier

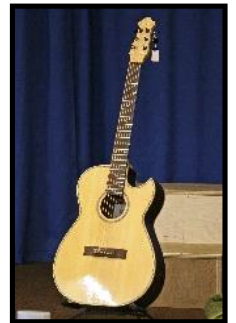
Con introduced himself by stating that he started working at Selmers repairing guitars, often for the pop stars of the day. His work was behind the scenes and he got no recognition for it so he decided to start his own business. His first two guitars were made in his bedroom, the first being a classical guitar. He also made a lot of his own tools. He took on all manner of jobs to make ends meet but only if they involved working with wood. His first workshop was at Mistley Quay and he claims that this was his most creative period as he did not have many customers and spent his time experimenting.



As business picked up his customers mostly wanted instruments repaired or copies of other instruments made. Repairs were always most urgent as the customers either had gigs coming up or lessons. He then moved to Brantham to a larger workshop and he can now also take on students to teach them how to make instruments.



Con then talked about how he makes a guitar using a mould as in the photograph. The sides are bent using his homemade heating iron and then fitted into the former. Liners are added then the back is usually added and glued in place, but he says that he has now started to add the front before the back, The fret board and neck are then fitted. The guitar in the photo will sell for about £3000.



Next he talked about lutes, all the segments of wood used to make the bowl of the lute are identical. They are first bent to the curved shape and then the taper is shaped with a knife and then planed until the curved form sits flat on a level surface and no light is visible beneath it. Then two pieces are mated together and refined to fit perfectly, they are then glued together. This is repeated until the sound box is complete.



The final instrument he talked about was the violin. Some of his work on old violins is a neck graft which involves elongating the neck for the modern pitch so they can be played in an orchestra. He then talked a bit about making violins. Again a mould is used but this time it is in two parts, the holes in the former in the photo are to accommodate clamps. Blocks are fitted between the top and bottom halves of the mould and then the bent sides are fitted and glued in place. The top former is removed, the top fitted and then the bottom fitted.

Con finishes all his instruments with 10—12 coats of an acid catalysed varnish, cutting back between coats.

The next photo shows an experimental stringed instrument made by Con based on a spiral. He is continuing to work on this form.

The talk generated many questions from the audience and I fear my report does not do justice to what was a very fascinating insight into the work of a luthier.

