

John Rawson clavichord, 1981

Unfretted clavichord, GG (short octave) C–e³, in light oak, with fall front, boxwood naturals and ebony sharps, sitting on a trestle stand. The clavichord is closely based (in terms of size, bridge stringing, soundboard, decorated sound hole, pins, etc), on an eighteenth-century instrument by an unknown maker in the Rodger Mirrey collection, although with a slightly extended range (the original compass is C–d³). The original instrument is dated to 1730. In dark stained wood with a painting of cherubs and coat-of-arms to the inside of the lid, it is now preserved in the St Cecilia's Hall museum of the University of Edinburgh – the County Durham-born Mirrey (1919–2007) donated 22 instruments to the University, collected from the 1950s onwards when he lived near Reigate. John Rawson made the unfretted clavichord in 1981. Rawson was a highly respected maker of clavichords, spinets and harpsichords active during the second half of the twentieth century. He wrote a number of well-known articles about construction techniques. In his youth, introduced by an actress friend of his mother, he met the harpsichord and clavichord maker Thomas Goff (1898–1975), who encouraged him to make his first two clavichords; the second of these he later rebuilt and sold to music critic and writer Felix Aprahamian. Goff and Goff's cabinet maker, [Joseph] Cobby, were inspirational, but when Rawson decided to return to instrument making after reading architecture at Cambridge University, Goff had retired, so Rawson learnt the necessary skills at the London College of Furniture. He set up his workshop at 27 Clerkenwell Close. There, Peter Bavington worked as his assistant, later taking over the workshop when Rawson moved to Oxford.

The clavichord was made for the clockmaker and restorer Freddy Hill (1932–2005), who lived all but the first few years of his life near Godalming in Surrey (his father was headmaster of Aldro School, which during World War II was evacuated from Sussex to Hall Place in Shackleford). Freddy taught and played music (particularly the flute) and was a founder member of the Music Box Society of Great Britain. The clavichord nameboard reads 'John Rawson' in stamped and painted script, while the back has a dedication in pencil: 'Made for Frederick Francis Hill, Russell Hall, Shackleford, 10th January 1981.' It came to the Keith Howard collection in July 2002.



