

## Introduction

### THE MANCHESTER GAMBA BOOK

The *Manchester Gamba Book*, a late 17<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript in the Watson Music Collection of the Manchester Public Library in Manchester, England, is a remarkable document for three reasons. (1) It is the largest single source of solo viol music from the period, containing 246 pieces in tablature (plus another 12 pieces in staff notation) in twenty-two different tunings. (2) It contains one of only two comprehensive lyra-viol ornament charts from the period. (3) It contains the most richly and interestingly ornamented lyra-viol piece in the entire literature of the instrument—a “Paven” in lyra-way tuning by Gervaise Gerrarde.

### HISTORY

The traceable history of the *Manchester Gamba Book* dates back only to 1909, when a Mr. C. Davis brought an untitled, unbound, unindexed manuscript to a meeting of the Musical Association where Dr. Henry Watson was presenting a paper. Mr. Davis could not remember how he had originally acquired the manuscript, but “it had been in his possession for a long time.” Dr. Watson purchased the manuscript from Mr. Davis and eventually donated it to the Manchester Public Library.

Internal evidence hints at the possible identity of the original compiler of the manuscript. Nearly every piece in the manuscript is followed by the name (or, in a few rare instances, the initials) of the composer or arranger of the piece. Half of the thirty-eight names that appear in the manuscript are otherwise unknown. The fact that four of these nineteen “otherwise unknown” contributors share the surname Read suggests that the manuscript was compiled in the Read household. The word “finis” appears only once in the entire manuscript (at the end of the fourth piece in the twenty-first tuning), suggesting that the compiler expected this to be the end of the collection. Henrie Read’s name as the composer of this “final” piece makes him the prime candidate as the compiler who modestly put his own piece at the end, or perhaps used it as a symbolic musical signature at the end of the compilation. Another nine pieces inconveniently follow that “final” piece, but two of those additional nine are also by Henrie Read, so he remains the prime candidate.

### THE MUSIC

This site presents the first forty-six tablature pieces from the manuscript. Two-thirds of these pieces require either no re-tuning at all, or merely re-tuning the bottom string down one step. The manuscript uses *accords*, or *unisons*, to

describe the various tunings (e.g., ffeff, ffehf, fefhf, etc.) where each letter indicates the fret on one string that is a unison with the next higher open string.

FIRST TUNING – ffeff -- “Violl Waye” (27 pieces)

. . . standard viol tuning

SECOND TUNING – ffehf -- “Violl Waye” variant (4 pieces)

. . . standard viol tuning, but sixth string is tuned down one whole step so that it is one octave below the fourth string

More than half of these thirty-one pieces are by Richard Sumarte (who is otherwise unknown, and who may have been a resident music teacher in the compiler’s household). Thirteen of these pieces are settings of 17<sup>th</sup>-century English popular songs.

An excellent beginning piece is the untitled sixteenth piece in the first tuning, by Stephen Goodall (who is also otherwise unknown). In this piece Goodall demonstrates the use of division-style embellishment on the repeat of each strain, and also demonstrates two different types of hemiola rhythm at the ends of the strains. In the untitled twentieth piece in the first tuning, Goodall demonstrates a unique use of the slur that creates a surprise for the ear (which should be a pleasant surprise if the left-hand fingers are still on the frets immediately preceding the slur).

THIRD TUNING — fefhf -- “Lyra Way” (15 pieces)

Re-tune third string up one half-step.

Re-tune fifth string down one whole-step,  
so that it is one octave below the re-tuned third string.

Re-tune sixth string down one whole-step,  
so that it is one octave below the fourth string.

The twelfth piece in this tuning, “A Thump” by Thomas Martine, presents a nice introduction to the ornament called a *thump* (left-hand pizzicato), demonstrating both open-string and stopped-string versions. This otherwise unornamented piece also offers an inviting blank canvas for adding other ornaments. Start by experimenting with the *backfall-and-beat* (appoggiatura) or the *shake* (trill) on the dotted quarter-note “c” frets on the top string. As the piece gets more densely ornamented on repeated playing, these ornaments could also be tried on the quarter-note occurrences of the this same fret. Any “d” fret on one of the upper strings presents an opportunity to try a *fall*. In final chords, a fret which creates a unison with the adjacent open string (such as the “f” fret in the final chord of this piece) invites the use of a *beat* (appoggiatura from below).

The last piece in this tuning is the most richly ornamented of all known lyra viol pieces, the extraordinary “Paven” by Gervaise Gerrarde that is the real musicological treasure at the heart of the manuscript.