

SOUNDS OF OUR CITY

Walter Stainton Meeson's dulcimer



One of the more unusual musical instruments in the collection is a dulcimer made in 1888 by W.S. Meeson of Leeds. Howard Beck, a descendent of the maker contacted the museum in 2011 and gave the following biographical information.

It turns out that Walter Meeson was born in Stockton on Tees, son of a brush-maker and beer retailer. We don't know how he gained his musical education but he seems to have been living in Shoreditch, London in 1888 where at the age of 22 he married his first wife Eliza Elizabeth Nockles. This is also the year in which he made the dulcimer and entered it into the Workmen's Industrial Exhibition held at the People's Palace for East London on Mile End Road. It won him a bronze medal.





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The plaque on the dulcimer reads “W.S. Meeson, Leeds” and he was certainly living in the city by 1911 when is appears at Oban Villas, Leopold Street in the census. The dulcimer is specifically mentioned in his will and was passed to his son Harold Meeson. Walter had made his living as a music teacher, musical instrument maker and piano tuner, and died a wealthy man in 1928.

Quite what inspired him make a dulcimer is unclear. The instrument originated at least 2000 years ago and was popular in the middle ages. It is the ancestor of hammered keyboard instruments such as the piano. Dulcimers are commonly used in the folk music of Eastern Europe but are also played in the traditional music of Wales, East Anglia and Northumbria.