

The Grove Dictionary of Instruments and its Illustrations

Jeremy Montagu

This has been something of a fiasco, and the lack of good pictures has led to much justified criticism in reviews. There were several causes and you might like to know them.

The first was the handover from Macmillan's 1984 edition to OUP for the 2014 version. Macmillan had kept none of the information about sources and copyright clearances for any of the 1984 illustrations, though all or most captions did include a credit, nor I think had they kept any of the huge stack of original photographs. So none of those illustrations could be used again in 2014 unless someone had had the time to chase up all those credit lines, find the owner and whether still alive and where, and if dead, who were the residuary legatees, and ask whether a) the picture could be used again in a revised entry which might or might not have been completely rewritten by somebody else, b) whether the original print or negative still existed (no digital cameras in those days), and c) how much the copyright owner would expect to be paid for re-use and whether the finances available were sufficient to cover it.

The second was the normal publisher's attitude to illustrations, which is first to determine affordable book length, then to specify wordage, and then to decide how much space would be available for illustrations. But a work like Grove is more difficult; it was anybody's guess what the final wordage would be – how long is a piece of string? So although our General Editor, Laurence Libin, had suggested the name of a picture editor, nothing was done about contacting him (yes, it was a he). So the OUP staff did nothing about contacting him until they knew how much space there might be available.

This was unfortunate because if he had been appointed at the same time as contributors were engaged, he could have spent a year or so chasing up all the old credit lines and getting many of the 1984 illustrations cleared for re-use. In addition, all the new contributors' offers of their own pictures for their entries would have been passed to him for sorting out subject to available space.

When all the text was in and it was time for normal discussion about illustrations, it was

then far too late to appoint anyone who would have had to start from scratch – there was a deadline to meet. To print five volumes of a dictionary like Grove, printers have to be booked in advance and have to allocate a slot in their production schedule; to alter this is both difficult, because there may be no free time for several months, even years, and very probably expensive.

So there was panic. People known to have collections of instruments, and who might be able to respond quickly at short notice, were contacted and were asked what we could offer. I sent a quick list, as I imagine others did, and I assume that the OUP staff whittled down our offers to the number they thought they would have space for.

So that, more or less, is how it happened – more or less because some of this I was told and some is surmise based on what I know from experience. At least we were told that contributors would be welcome to send in their own pictures to be used for the electronic version of 2014 in Grove Music Online, and I hope that will happen or even by now maybe has happened.

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