

**The composer George Lloyd (1913 – 1998)** showed exceptional musical talent as a child. He began to play the violin at the age of 5, and by the time he was 20 he had written 3 symphonies and conducted all of them in performance, the 3<sup>rd</sup> being broadcast by the BBC. By the age of 25 he had two large scale operas performed in London, at The Lyceum and at Covent Garden.

As a young man, George Lloyd could not decide if he should be a composer, a conductor or a violinist. He certainly showed great talent as an instrumentalist and in 1929 at the age of 16 he taken on as a pupil by the leading English violinist of the day, virtuoso **Albert Sammons**, who had that year made a popular success with the first recording of the Elgar *Violin Concerto in B Minor*.

After being accepted as a pupil by Sammons, it was clear that George needed a good instrument, and by extraordinary good fortune, a fine 18<sup>th</sup> Century instrument, which was traced back to Lady Emma Hamilton, was made available to him through a family connection.

The Lloyd family lived at **The Grove, Church Road, Upper Norwood**, having moved to London from St. Ives in Cornwall to allow George to pursue his musical studies. With them at The Grove lived Miss Gladys Combes, who had been engaged as a teacher and nurse for George when he became seriously ill with rheumatic fever and was unable to attend school for long periods.

His teacher Miss Combes had an aunt, known as '**Black Auntie**,' who was in possession of a fine violin believed to have been made in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century by the **violin maker John Betts**. Betts was the finest English maker of his time and was responsible for bringing the first Stradivarius instruments into England. Miss Coombes and the composer's father purchased the Betts violin and presented it to the young George Lloyd shortly after he began lessons with Albert Sammons.

With the violin came a letter to Miss Combes from '**Black Auntie**,' explaining that the instrument had once belonged to Emma, Lady Hamilton. The letter sets out the path by which the instrument had come into her hands: according to Black Auntie, her husband was given the violin by a **John Tanner**, who had in turn been given it by his grandfather, **John Jefferies** who was **butler to Lady Emma Hamilton** in her last years and who had **married Lady Hamilton's lady's maid**.

The letter provides a brief outline of the genealogy and businesses of the Jefferies family, who ran a newsagent and estate agency in **Brighton**, and of their connection to **Black Auntie**.

The John Betts violin was George Lloyd's principal instrument until he replaced it with a modern instrument from Cremona in the 1970s, and '*Lady Hamilton*,' as the Betts instrument is known, was given to his great niece, Marian Lloyd, who is a violin teacher.

**The George Lloyd Society** is gathering material for a biography of the composer and is researching the authenticity of the association of his violin with Lady Emma Hamilton.

1. Although the violin is not signed, it has been appraised by several violin experts, who confirm that the instrument is probably made by John Betts, although not proven.
2. Did Emma Hamilton play the violin? Her husband, William Hamilton, was a fine player, and there is a famous painting of him playing with Mozart. Nelson however disliked the instrument.

3. Did Emma Hamilton have a butler named Jefferies from Brighton, who married Emma's lady's maid who kept a hat shop? Did Jefferies have a grandson called John Tanner?

### **The letter – Background**

The letter was addressed to Miss Gladys Combes, at The Grove, Church Road, Upper Norwood, SE19, and posted in Chichester on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1930. Gladys Combes was engaged by William A C Lloyd to home school his young son, the composer George Lloyd, who was unable to attend school due to recurring bouts of rheumatic fever. When the talented violinist Lloyd was taken on as a pupil by virtuoso Albert Sammons, Gladys Combes purchased a fine violin from her aunt.

George Lloyd and Gladys Combes remained close friends, and after George was badly injured while serving on *HMS Trinidad* in 1942, he and his wife Nancy stayed with Miss Combes at West Wittering, where she helped to nurse him back to health. Miss Combes became godmother to the composer's nephew, (later his record producer), William Lloyd.

In 1971, after George Lloyd had re-started his musical career after 30 years in the wilderness, he composed *Aubade*, for two pianos. In his note to the piece he refers to a dream sequence in which Lady Hamilton is playing the violin, as follows:

*Dawn: I am almost awake; pictures flit through my mind, part dream, part fancy. I am wandering through a wood; some charcoal burners are gathered in a clearing, one plays a fiddle and two or three dance. An old man sits by a fire, he has a large book on his knees. I peer over his shoulder. The pages are military maps and pictures of battles. The figures on the pages start to move, they are tin soldiers executing military manoeuvres. One grand fellow happens to be Wellington. A page turns, and the tin soldiers turn into ghosts of Waterloo. The girl playing the fiddle is really Lady Hamilton, she and Wellington fall in love; they sing a duet and dance a waltz....etc.*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVkqINkPzpo&list=RDCVkqINkPzpo&start\\_radio=1&t=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVkqINkPzpo&list=RDCVkqINkPzpo&start_radio=1&t=5)

George Lloyd appeared a guest on the BBC radio programme, *Desert Island Discs*, and chose as his luxury on the Desert Island a portrait of Emma, Lady Hamilton, painted by Romney.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0093pn9>

### **The letter – Summary**

The violin was given by Lady Hamilton to John Jefferies her butler. He gave it to his grandson, John Tanner who gave it to Black Auntie's husband.

### **The letter – Transcript**

Address: Miss Gladys Combes, at The Grove, Church Road, Upper Norwood, SE19.

Postmark: Chichester 8.45, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1930. (Envelope overwritten: *Re the Betts violin.*)

My dear Gladys,

Lady Hamilton died 1816 somewhere near Calais. My husband was born 1851 so would be nearing 80 now if he were alive. John Tanner who gave him the violin was about the same age and the violin was given to Tanner by his grandfather John Jefferies, who was butler to Lady H. It seems he married the lady's maid, and between them they were given a given a good many things.

The Jefferies were house agents and newspaper people at Brighton, and I believe the lady's-maid had a hat shop or something of that kind. The newspaper business was sold but still exists at Hove. (Jefferies and North) The Jefferies has never been struck off, though there are none of the family left to be in it. John Jefferies had two sons, and at least one daughter, Mrs Tanner, mother of John.

'Emma' was, as she knew, a real 'bad lot', but there is no doubt the violin is very old, though I doubt its being of any great value. Still I do not want to lose it and wonder whether it is not a bit risky (sic) to leave it at Vic booking office in this day of sharpers.

I heard from Madge on Monday they are all right – not greatly struck on the country. Kath looking forward to seeing you on Wednesday. Hope the weather won't repeat the Ascot escapade.

Children all well. Tag a little puffy owing to the laden atmosphere. Bestest love, dear, from your loving

Black Auntie.

Overwritten by W A C Lloyd: Jessop and W Whitehorn both agree that the violin is by John Betts (The Betts that found the Strad?)

**The letter - Facsimile**

June 20<sup>th</sup> 6 p.m.

My dear Gladys,  
 Lady Hamilton died 1816 somewhere near Calais. My husband was born 1851 so would be nearing 80 now if he were alive. John Tanner who gave him the violin was about the same age and the violin was given to Tanner by his grandfather John Jefferies, who was butler to Lady H. It seems he married the lady's maid and between them they were given a good many things. The Jefferies were house agents & newspaper people at Brighton & Hove, the lady's-maid had a hat shop or something of that kind. The newspaper business was sold but still exists at Hove. (Jefferies and North) The Jefferies has never been struck off, though there are none of the family left to be in it. John Jefferies had two sons & at least one daughter, Mrs Tanner, mother of John. 'Emma' was as you know a real 'bad lot'.

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### Did Lady Emma Hamilton play the violin?

Emma was known as a great beauty, and an experienced dancer. She was certainly an accomplished musician with great artistic talent according to a contemporary account - a fine operatic singer and proficient at the harp. Elisabeth-Louise Le Brun painted her playing the tambourine, Joshua Reynolds painted her at the keyboard, and George Stubbs made a drawing of her playing the cymbals and another playing the lyre. (The lyre and tambourine were both used as props for her performances.) It is known that her husband, Sir William Hamilton, was a particularly good violin player, and there is a painting of him playing chamber music with the Mozart in Naples. It now appears that Emma herself may also have been a violinist. Although she was certainly keen on the violin, (cf. Wechsberg) Nelson apparently was not so enthusiastic, although if he disliked the instrument it is odd that he should have carried one with him on board *HMS Victory*.

*'Then there is the 'Lord Nelson' Stradivari, found in an officer's state room on [the Victory] after the battle of Trafalgar.... Nelson didn't care for violinists. Lady Hamilton hired Paganini once for a musical soiree in Leghorn, and Lord Nelson had to sit quiet and listen. Perhaps it wasn't such a sacrifice' (p. 158 'The Violin' Joseph Wechsberg)*

*"The girl, who was as beautiful as an angel, though she had never been able to learn to read or write with any fluency, had great artistic talent. She turned to full account the advantages offered by his stay in Italy and by the taste of Sir William Hamilton. She became a good musician and developed a unique talent which may seem foolish in description, but which enchanted all spectators and drove artists to despair. "(Memoirs of the Comtesse de Boigne, Volume 1.)*

*"Indeed, music represented more than a simple pastime for Lord Hamilton. The diplomat had learned to play the violin in London under the composer performer Felice Giardini and kept a box at the Teatro San Carlo (for which he paid 77 ducats annually). Emma had a good soprano voice and loved to sing; and his first wife Catherine was a fine harpsichord player. After attending a musical evening, and referring to Catherine, once Lady Anne Miller noted: "Mrs. Hamilton's musical assembly, which she gives once a week, is rendered perfect by her elegant taste and fine performance. It is called an Accademia di Musica, and I suppose no country can produce a more complete band of excellent performers".*

*(Source unknown quoted by [http://www.herculaneum.ox.ac.uk/?q=knight#\\_ftn15](http://www.herculaneum.ox.ac.uk/?q=knight#_ftn15) )*

*Other members of Hamilton's "Accademia di Musica", whose payment chits have survived, [15] included the violinist and composer Emanuele Bardella and a certain Gennaro Alessandro. On another occasion Hamilton confided to his nephew: "I supped in private en famille with the King and Queen of Naples lately, after having accompanied His Sicilian Majesty's singing, and charming harmony we made. The Queen laughed, for she really sings well". [16] A scène de genre by Pietro Fabris, now in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery of Edinburgh, portrays a similar scene. In the Neapolitan residence of Lord Fortrose, in May 1770, a very special chamber concert is in progress. The host, standing with his back to us, is listening to William Hamilton and the musician Gaetano Pugnani, both playing the violin, while the guests Leopold Mozart and his very young son Wolfgang Amadeus accompany the two gentlemen on the harpsichord. [17]*



### The Jefferies Family

We currently know nothing about the Jefferies family except what is written in the letter, above.

The George Lloyd Society is now appealing for any information about:

- The Jefferies family of Brighton, and particular:
- their daughter Mrs Tanner and their grandson John Tanner, born c. 1851.
- Jefferies and North, Newsagents, Hove.
- Jefferies and North, Newsagents, Brighton
- Mrs Jefferies, who had a hat shop *'or something of the kind'*
- Black Auntie, and her niece, Miss Gladys Combes.
- Any information about Emma Hamilton's servants, particularly in the Brighton area.
- Any information about Emma Hamilton playing the violin.

If you have any information, or if you would like to be kept up to date with this story as it develops, please contact the George Lloyd Society. <https://www.georgelloyd.com/lady-hamilton>

The *Emma Hamilton* violin and John Betts - Violin Maker (1752 – 1823)



The Lady Hamilton violin

John Betts was the leading instrument dealer of his time in London, was one of the first to import Italian instruments.

*“Little is known about his early life. He was the son of Edward Betts, a farmer from Stamford. In 1765 he moved to London to apprentice with Richard Duke and after seven years he became shop foreman, eventually buying the business from Duke's daughter. By 1781 he was working independently and hired his first apprentice around that time. In addition to his work as a maker, Betts imported the highest-calibre Italian instruments to London, and was partly responsible for the ascent of Stradivari's reputation to equal Stainer's in public opinion of the period. His shop was staffed by some of the best 18th and 19th century British craftsmen, including Vincenzo Panormo, Joseph Hill II, Henry Lockett Hill, Richard Tobin, Bernard Simon Fendt, and John Furber.*

*Betts made fewer instruments in his later years, his reputation as an expert and connoisseur fully established. He died in 1823, leaving the business to his younger brother Arthur, who learned the craft from him.*

*Over the course of its history the shop produced a large range of instruments, from inexpensive models with painted purfling to some of the most exquisite Stradivari and Guarneri copies in the history of British violin making. Under Arthur especially the shop became known for its reproductions of historic instruments, similar to the activities of J.B. Vuillaume in Paris. John Dodd and Thomas Tubbs were among the shop's best suppliers of bows. It continued into the 1860s under the direction of Arthur's sons Arthur II and John II before finally closing in 1867. “ <https://tinyurl.com/y5j6roxo>*

To subscribe to our newsletter to keep up to date with this story, or to learn about the work of the George Lloyd Society, please visit: <https://www.georgelloyd.com/lady-hamilton>

thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Lloyd".

William Lloyd

