THE INTERNATIONAL Guitar Research Centre (hereafter referred to as IGRC) held its inaugural symposium weekend at the University of Surrey, on 29 and 30 March, 2014. The IGRC aims to establish an international hub for guitar-centred research for all styles of music in Guildford. Throughout the launch a number of lecture-recitals, papers and discussion panels were ran in tandem with a series of public events and recitals. With John Williams as Honorary President of the IRGC, the organisation will operate under its Director, Professor Steve Goss, and Deputy Director, Dr Milton Mermikides.

Future plans include the hosting of an annual research symposium, co-hosting events with the IGF at London’s South Bank and King’s Place, developing an online database of guitar research, building an online network of current guitar researchers and research projects, increasing the number of affiliated institutions and industry partnerships, providing an online peer-reviewed publishing platform for guitar research, and helping applications for funded research projects.

The first meeting had been expected to take place at a reasonably low-key level for the opening symposium. But applications to give lectures flooded in from round the world with scholars not only from the United Kingdom but also from Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, Czech Republic, South Africa, and several from the USA (including New York, California, Colorado, and Ohio).

Though it was not possible for any one person to attend all the lectures (there were running simultaneously each day!), the scope and extent of the subjects chosen was extensive. Lectures were grouped under various headings which comprised The Guitar in the 20th Century, Nationalism
and the Guitar. 19th Century Guitar, Extended Techniques, Women and the Guitar, Touch and Cesture, Chamber Music Teaching, and lecture-recitals to illustrate the microtonal guitar.

Thus topics moved from Graham Klippel’s avant-garde presentation of Michael Finnissy and the Guitar to Matanya Ophoo’s New Light on the Provenance of Boccherini’s Guitar Quartets. My own lecture, the Evolution of the Solo Guitar Recital 1888 to the Present Day, was preceded by Allan Clive Jones’s introduction to Henri Sauquet’s Unpublished Guitar Music, while in the afternoon of that day Gilbert Biberian presented his book Liber: Articulation and Touch on the Guitar. One of the ardent globe trotters present was Avril Kinsey from the Cape Town Academy of Music, South Africa with Discovering 320 Works for Classical Guitar by 72 South African Composers, followed immediately after by Vladislav Blaha’s demonstration of 20th Century Czech Guitar Music.

For the 20th century Jan de Klooe gave a fascinating account of Boris Perott’s life with the guitar, while under the heading of the 19th century research studies, Stanley Alexandrowicz of the Manhattan School of Music, New York, explained The Evolution of the Romantic Multi-String Guitar. He was followed by Luigi Attedemo from the Donizetti Conservatoire, Bergamo, Italy on The Origins of the Virtuoso Technique of the 19th Century in the Works of Paganini. Also brilliantly at home in the English language were Gerhard Penn with new information on Giuliani’s biography and Andreas Stevens on

The Munich Meeting of 1924 between Segovia and Llobet, both lecturers being from the Lake Constance Research Meeting, Switzerland.

As well as this wide range of lectures, Steve Goss organised several high level concerts over the weekend featuring full recitals by both Xuefei Yang (jetting in from Beijing), and the Amadeus Guitar Duo (Thomas Kirchoff and Dale Kavanagh), with shorter recitals by Michael Partington from Seattle, Bridget and Milton Mermilides (contemporary digital compositions), and a rousing climactic performance by Declan Zapala, a young, startlingly original virtuoso player who will surely become ever more famous.

Top billing was given to a public conversation between Steve Goss and John Williams. The topics covered included John Williams’s ‘retirement’ and his forthcoming plans for a very busy artistic year, his advocacy of a wide range of world music, and some fascinating insights into a great player’s practice routines.

As mentioned above, the next move with the IGRG is to establish a guitar portal online, with guitar research papers and dissertations available.
to all those interested. Maurice Summerfield has kindly donated a large collection of guitar literature to the IGRC and the Maurice J. Summerfield Archive will be catalogued over the coming months. There are also plans for a new online journal to be published in conjunction with the IGRA (International Guitar Research Archives), at California State University, Northridge, California.

IGRA was founded in 1980 by Professor Ronald C. Purcell on the donation of the Vahdah Olcott-Bickford Collection. Originally housed in the Music Department, IGRA now holds one of the world’s largest collections of guitar sheet music, including works for solo guitar, ensemble pieces for multiple guitars, and ensemble pieces for guitar and other instruments.

IGRA also holds a host of documents relevant to the lives and careers of numerous guitarists and professional associations, as well as other guitar-related materials. IGRA holdings include sheet music, periodicals, correspondence, photographs, audio recordings in numerous formats, printed books, and other materials. Collections documenting the careers of Andrés Segovia, Laurindo Almeida, Vicente Gomez, and others are included.

The IGRC at the University of Surrey has been most successfully launched. Its very existence, as well as the link with California State University, is a demonstration of the guitar’s enhanced academic status as a worthy focus of wide and detailed research. Congratulations are due to Professor Steve Goss and his team for their vision, optimism, and organisational expertise.