

John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection



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John Clark was brought up in Perth and enjoyed many summer holidays on a traditional Scottish farm, trained as a carpenter and went on to become a teacher of technical subjects at Elgin Academy. His original pastimes included fly-fishing and marquetry but in the last decades of the last century he turned his skilled hands, and keen eye for detail, to luthiery.

In the years that followed he built and amassed a collection of professional-grade, exquisitely finished, 5-string banjos whose playability and sound quality readily compare with high-end new and vintage instruments normally only found in the bluegrass market in the United States.

Using prime-quality seasoned tonewoods including curly maple, mahogany, beech and sycamore he manufactured, in Elgin, all of the necks, pots and resonators – inlaying meticulously the pegheads and fretboards with mother of pearl and abalone. He used only the highest quality of hardware for the pot assemblies, tuners, heads and tailpieces, importing from Stewart-MacDonald, Steve Huber, Bill Sullivan, Bill Keith, Jim Stull and the Dieterichs of Bucks County Music.

John was a keen player and regular bluegrass festival-goer for around 20 years. At these festivals he generated a following of the UK's top banjo pickers, including Bill Forster and the late Jim Hyndman who, year on year, would play and relish the new additions to the "Elgin" Banjo Collection

While he gifted a few of these unique instruments to close friends, only now is the remainder of the collection available for sale. To own and enjoy one of these studio- and stage-quality instruments please, in the first instance, contact Robin Wallace of Longway Bluegrass Band on 07831 405811. Additionally there is also available an extensive collection of finished or part-finished rims, resonators and necks.



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01 Everyday Practice Banjo

Among the first of John's instruments, modestly labelled his "Everyday Practice Banjo", this example features a beech and mahogany laminated neck with veneered fiddle-cut peghead and a curly maple resonator.

The ebony fretboard is inlaid with mother-of-pearl hearts and flowers inlay and has a mother-of-pearl laminated nut. All five tuners are from Stewart-MacDonald with strings passing over a J.T Clark bridge on a Steve Huber head to a Waverly adjustable tailpiece.

A 3 ply laminated maple rim supports the Stewart-Macdonald pot assembly comprising a two piece tube and plate flange, tension hoop and armrest. A 20 hole Mastertone-style flathead tone ring gives this banjo a distinctive vintage sound.

It plays cleanly and clearly all over the neck.



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02 Flying Eagle

This banjo has a curly maple laminated neck and double veneered double 'C' cut Mastertone style peghead. It is fitted with Stewart-MacDonald tuning pegs.

A striking rosewood fretboard is inlaid with a mother-of-pearl "Flying Eagle" set. 5th string nails are fitted above and beyond the seventh fret.

The resonator is laminated from curly maple sourced from the same batch as the neck, originally the floor of the gym in the local Keith school!

The pot assembly is mounted on block-construction curly maple rim and consists of a "Bucks County Music" no hole tone ring and Stewart-MacDonald "Tube & Plate" flange, tension hoop, "5 star" head and armrest. The strings pass over a bone nut, via a Snuffy Smith bridge to a Kershner tailpiece.

This banjo, over many years, has been a favourite of top players. It has a fast, slim neck and bell-like projection in all positions. It is loud and sweet.



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03 The Kenmore

This, John's third build, was a venture into mahogany construction. It features a three-piece laminated mahogany neck with a Mastertone double 'C' cut peghead. The peghead is veneered in ebony and the fingerboard is premium grade ebony, all inlaid with a distinctive "Legacy" pattern in "Kenmore" mother-of-pearl.

The resonator is laminated from counter-grained striped mahogany and, uniquely, inlaid with the shells of three laburnum oysters ground and polished to profile. Mainly Stewart-MacDonald hardware (flat-head tone ring, one piece flange, tension hoop and armrest) is mounted on a mahogany block-construction rim. The strings extend from Schaller 'D' tuners on the 3rd & 2nd strings and Stewart-MacDonald "5 Star" tuners on the 1st, 4th and 5th strings over bone nuts and a J. T. Clark bridge (on a Remo "Weather King" head) to the Kershner tailpiece.

Being from mahogany this banjo has a resonant, mellow, but loud, sound reminiscent of the pre-war Gibsons still sought after today. It plays cleanly everywhere and has good balance and projection.



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04 Sonflower

With the increasing popularity of Stelling banjos in bluegrass circles in the late '90s John styled the necks of several of his creations after well-known Stelling models, in this case John's "Sonflower" model. *Note that the tone ring and rim are still fitted together in pre-war Mastertone style, not wedge-fitted as developed by Geoff Stelling.*

The laminated maple neck has a walnut top veneer inlaid, like the ebony fingerboard, with a mother-of-pearl "Sunflower" pattern. All of the tuning pegs are Stewart-MacDonald Waverly 2 ring tuning pegs, with the strings passing over a bone nut, J. T. Clark bridge (sitting on a Bill Sullivan First Quality head) to a Kershner tailpiece.

The rim is from maple in a block-construction with a First Quality "Tennessee 20" tone ring (complete with Certificate of Ownership). The one-piece flange, tension hoop and armrest are all nickel plated and from Stewart-MacDonald. The banjo is completed with a highly-figured laminated maple resonator.



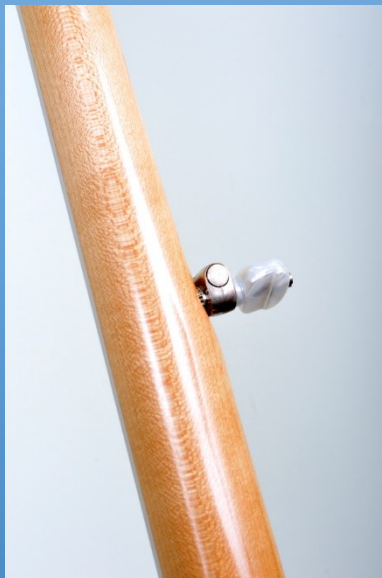
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05 Silver Fox – Open back

John made only a few open-back banjos with this as the first example. It has a laminated maple neck featuring a traditional Mastertone double 'C' cut peghead, inlaid with a beautiful "Silver Fox" in mother-of-pearl complete with 'foxy' look.

The open-back rim is of block beech construction with a premium grade maple top tone ring. The back of the rim is veneered in ebony and inlaid with mother-of-pearl inlay. Two rings of rosewood and maple complete the edge bindings. The heel of the neck has mother-of-pearl inlays to the same pattern. The old-time look (and sound) is completed by a "Remo" Renaissance head tensioned down by a Stewart-MacDonald shoe and bolt tension hoop and protected by a Stewart-MacDonald arm rest.

The strings leave Stewart-Macdonald Waverly double ring tuning pegs and pass over bone nuts and a J.T.Clark Bridge to a Kershner tailpiece. The ebony fretboard is inlaid with a delicate mother-of-pearl inlay pattern. This is a classic old-time 'players' banjo which frails beautifully and is sweet and mellow.



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06 Silver Fox – Resonator

With the increasing popularity of Stelling banjos in bluegrass circles in the late '90s John styled the necks of several of his creations after well-known Stelling models, in this case John's "Silver Fox" model. Note that the tone ring and rim are still fitted together in pre-war Mastertone style, not wedge-fitted as developed by Geoff Stelling.

This example has a one-piece maple neck with the peghead veneered in ebony. The tuning pegs are Schaller 'D' tuners on the 2nd & 3rd strings and 2-ring Waverlys on the 1st, 4th & 5th strings. The ebony finger board is inlaid with a unique abalone leaf pattern.

The strings pass over a bone nut, J. T. Clark bridge to a Kershner tail piece.

A block construction maple rim supports a "Jim Stull" "Cathay" tone ring and a First Quality frosted head. The one-piece flange, tension hoop and arm-rest are from Stewart-MacDonald. It completes in a striking laminated maple resonator.

This banjo plays easily to produce a loud pre-war tone.



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08 Staghorn

With the increasing popularity of Stelling banjos in bluegrass circles in the late '90s John styled the necks of several of his creations after well-known Stelling models, in this case John's "Staghorn" model. *Note that the tone ring and rim are still fitted together in pre-war Mastertone style, not wedge-fitted as developed by Geoff Stelling.*

Using American black walnut for the neck and laminated resonator he began the emulation of the appearance of the Staghorn. Inlaying the ebony-veneered peghead with abalone antlers, the ebony fretboard with the abalone staghorn pattern and the resonator with maple antlers completes the homage.

The tuning pegs are Schaller 'D' tuners on the 2nd & 3rd strings and 2-ring Waverlys on the 1st, 4th & 5th strings.

The strings pass over a bone nut, J. T. Clark bridge to a Kershner tailpiece.

A block-construction maple rim supports a Bill Sullivan First Quality tone ring and a Remo frosted head. The one-piece flange, tension hoop and armrest are from Stewart-MacDonald.

This beautiful banjo is loud, sweet and plays well at all positions.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection *SOLD*

09 Anniversary

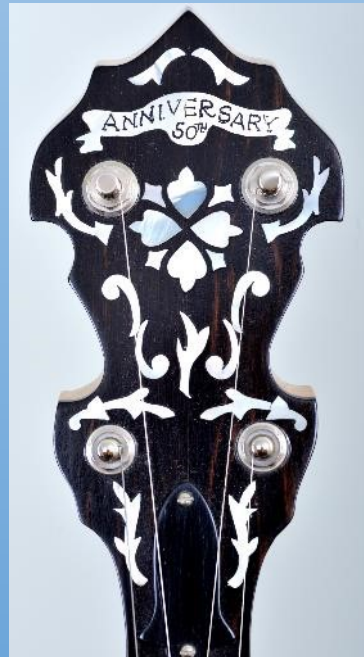
This is a very distinctive banjo, with classic "Hearts and Flowers" appointment, and use highest quality figured curly maple everywhere.

The peghead is the classic "Double-C" cut veneered in ebony, carrying Stewart-MacDonald 5 star and Schaller de-tuners. The neck is laminated curly maple with an ebony inlaid strip running full-length to an ebony-capped heel. The fretboard is black ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl "Hearts and Flowers" pattern.

The laminated maple resonator is aflame with figure, attached to a Stewart-MacDonald one piece flange. The rim is block-constructed from maple and features a Stewart-MacDonald flathead tone ring, notched tension hoop and armrest.

The strings over a bone nut and J. T. Clark bridge, on a Stewart-MacDonald 5 star head, to a Kershner tailpiece.

This is a loud, sweet, easy playing banjo, with clear projection at every position on the neck.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection

10 Wolf Head

This is another distinctive banjo, with a black pearl "Wolf Head" inlaid into the ebony veneer on a Mastertone-style double 'C' cut peghead. It has a laminated maple neck with ebony fretboard inlaid with a mother-of-pearl acorn & oak leaves pattern, also present on the heel of the neck. The laminated maple resonator is inlaid with two rings of laburnum oysters – a very unique decorative feature.

The strings pass from four Bill Keith Scruggs de-tuning pegs over a bone nut, J. T. Clark bridge to a rare, adjustable "Fults" tailpiece.

The pot hardware sits on a block-construction rim and comprises Stewart-MacDonald flat head tone ring, one piece flange, tension hoop and armrest above a "Remo" Weather King head.

The sound quality and playability of this banjo are superb in a bluegrass, or any other, setting.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection

11 Eagles & Ducks – Open back

John made only a few open-back banjos with this as the second example. It has a laminated mahogany neck featuring a traditional Mastertone double 'C' cut peghead, inlaid with a beautiful mother-of-pearl & abalone "Eagle fishing" motif.

This open-back rim is of block-mahogany construction with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " diameter brass hoop tone ring. The back of the rim is veneered in $\frac{1}{4}$ " "ebony and the back of the heel is inlaid with a mother-of-pearl flower pattern. Two rings of rosewood and maple chequers complete the rim.

The old-time look (and sound) is completed by a "Remo" Renaissance head tensioned down by a Stewart-MacDonald shoe and bolt tension hoop assembly and protected by a Stewart-MacDonald armrest.

The strings leave Stewart-MacDonald Waverly planetary tuning pegs and pass over bone nuts and a J. T. Clark Bridge to a Kershner tailpiece. The Brazilian walnut fretboard in inlaid with a stunning mother-of-pearl & abalone system of ducks and a single hawk.

The banjo has a J. T. Clark stainless steel straight-line tailpiece and is another classic old-time 'players' banjo. It is loud, sweet and mellow and frails easily.



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13 Hearts with Brass

This is a one-of-a-kind instrument with much of the hardware developed in Elgin by John, including a tone ring cast in brass for him to the pre-war Mastertone specification.

The neck is from American black walnut with a Mastertone double 'C' cut peghead finished with ebony veneer inlaid with a mother-of-pearl "Heart" motif. The fretboard is from ebony with a mother-of-pearl "Heart" pattern inlay.

The rim is from maple in block-construction accommodating shoe and bolt hooks connecting with a brass tension hoop of John's design. The one-piece flange is cut from sheet brass with hole-trio perforations. A "Remo" Weather King frosted head completes the heavy pot assembly which has a novel walnut and maple armrest of John's design. The resonator is laminated from American black walnut.

All tuning pegs are from Schaller and the strings pass over a bone nut and J. T. Clark bridge to a Presto tailpiece.

This instrument has an understandably bell-like tone that would transcend the bluegrass boundaries into perhaps classical banjo territory.



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14 Hearts & Flowers

This banjo marked John's return to the bluegrass campaign with a close copy of the Gibson "Earl Scruggs" model. It has a one-piece maple neck with the peghead cut in the classic "Double-C" shape, veneered in ebony and an ebony fretboard all inlaid in mother-of-pearl with the Scruggs' "Hearts & Flowers" pattern. The heel is also veneered and inlaid.

A laminated maple rim supports a Stewart-MacDonald flat head tone ring and "5 star" head tensioned down by a Stew-Mac one piece flange and notched tension hoop, protected by a Stewart-MacDonald armrest. This assembly sits in a striking flamed maple laminated resonator.

The strings all leave Stewart-MacDonald Planetary tuning pegs and pass over a mother-of-pearl nut and a J. T. Clark bridge to a "Presto" tailpiece.

This banjo has the classic Mastertone appearance and sound - poppy, crisp and loud.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection *SOLD*

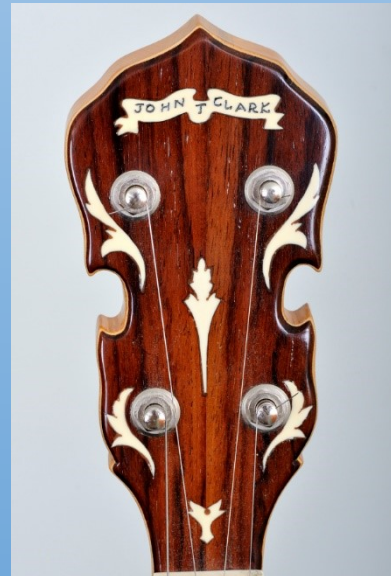
15 St Giles Ivory Open Back Conversion

This banjo is quite unique within the collection. It began life as an open-back instrument, but after a while had a resonator added. It frails beautifully and offers the tone of an old-time banjo but with the volume increased by the maple flat-back resonator assembly. This would be ideal when set in a large old-time or square dance band.

It has a laminated maple neck with fiddle-cut style peghead accommodating Schaller tuning pegs. The rosewood fretboard and resonator are inlaid with ivory cut from the keys of the organ in St Giles church in Elgin.

It has a laminated maple rim with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " brass tone ring supporting a "Remo" frosted Weather King head secured by an engraved tension hoop and multi-piece "Shoes & Hooks" flange.

The strings run over a bone nut, J. T. Clark bridge to an engraved "Kershner" style tail piece made by John. The banjo is completed by a rosewood and maple arm rest.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection

16 Flying Eagle I

In another return to bluegrass instruments this banjo was built with a "Huber" tone ring (1999) on a sycamore block-construction rim.

A Stewart-MacDonald one piece flange and tension hoop secure a "5 star" head into a laminated sycamore resonator with a Stewart-MacDonald armrest.

The one-piece neck is from sycamore and has a Mastertone double 'C' cut head with "Flying Eagle" mother-of-pearl inlaid into ebony. The fretboard is brown ebony and has the classic "Flying-Eagle" inlay pattern in mother-of pearl.

The strings run from "5 star" tuners over a bone & mother-of-pearl nut to a J. T. Clark bridge and Kershner tailpiece.

The banjo is loud and articulate at all positions on the neck and responds well from the lightest to heaviest touch.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection SOLD

17 Blackberry Blossom

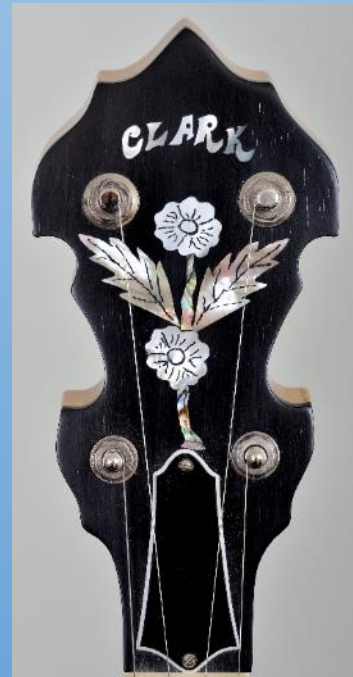
Named after the melodic banjo tune that dominated bluegrass festival picking sessions at the time, this banjo has a unique "Blackberry Blossom" appointment, and is made from the highest quality figured curly maple everywhere.

The peghead is the classic "Double-C" cut veneered in ebony, carrying Stewart-MacDonald Waverly 2-ring and Schaller de-tuners. The one-piece neck is highly figured and has an ebony-capped heel. The fretboard is black ebony inlaid with abalone and mother-of-pearl "Blackberry Blossom" pattern.

The laminated maple resonator is flamed maple and has a unique inlay of a blue tit clinging to a flower stem, all in mother-of-pearl and abalone. A one-piece Bill Sullivan First Quality flange, flathead tone ring, tension hoop and frosted head are completed with a Stewart-MacDonald armrest. The rim is block-constructed from maple.

The strings over a bone nut and J. T. Clark bridge to a Kershner tailpiece.

This is an elegant banjo but it is also articulate, loud and very easy-playing.



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18 J D Crowe '75

This banjo is styled after, but not slavishly on, the "J.D. Crowe '75" RB3 Gibson Mastertone.

It has a one piece maple neck, with a Mastertone-style double 'C' cut peghead and '75-like mother of pearl inlay on a walnut veneer.

The brown ebony neck is inlaid with a "Flying Eagle" mother-of-pearl pattern and the heel of the neck has an ebony capping.

Stewart-MacDonald Waverly tuning pegs tension the 1st, 4th and 5th strings and Schaller 'D' tuning pegs allow adjustment of the 2nd & 3rd strings. The strings pass over a bone nut and J. T. Clark bridge to a Kershner tailpiece.

The rim is made from maple in block- construction and supports a "Huber" tone ring (2004) weighing just over 3lb. A Stewart-MacDonald one piece flange and notched tension hoop stretch a "Remo" Weather King head, protected by a Stewart-MacDonald armrest. A laminated maple resonator completes the instrument.

This is a bluegrass cannon that projects effortlessly and, with the Huber ring, produces the "JD sound".



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19 Bird of Prey

With the increasing popularity of Stelling banjos in bluegrass circles in the late '90s John styled the necks of several of his creations after well-known Stelling models, in this case John's "Bird of Prey" model. *Note that the tone ring and rim are still fitted together in pre-war Mastertone style, not wedge-fitted as developed by Geoff Stelling.*

A laminated maple neck with ebony capping on the heel has a peghead inlaid in abalone and mother-of-pearl with a golden eagle (fishing) pattern. The laminated maple resonator has a striking golden eagle marquetry inlay on its back. The fretboard is from black ebony and has an acorn & oak leaves pattern inlaid in mother-of-pearl and abalone. While the decoration almost defies description, the rest of the specification is stellar.

A premium "Huber" tone ring is included, mounted on block-construction maple rim. The one piece flange, notched tension hoop and armrest are from Stewart-MacDonald. The strings pass from Stewart-MacDonald 2-ring Waverly tuning pegs over a bone nut then to a J. T. Clark bridge on a Sullivans' First Quality frosted head and on to a Kershner tailpiece.

This is an eye- and ear-catching banjo that in all respects is outstanding. It is loud and deep.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection

21 Flying Eagle II

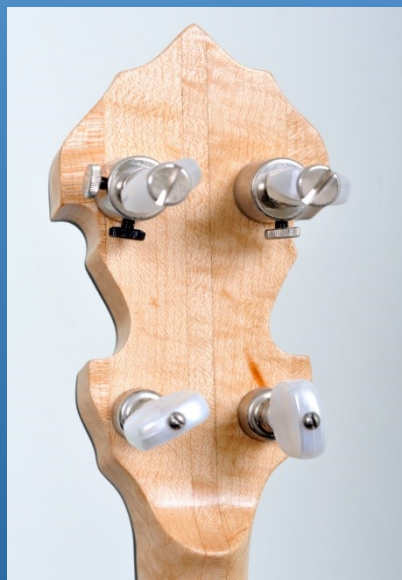
This was among the last banjos that John would complete, although there is a stock of finished or part-finished componentry available to buy.

This is another Flying Eagle design. It has a Stewart-MacDonald flathead tone ring on a laminated curly maple block- construction rim. A Stewart-MacDonald one piece flange and tension hoop secure a "5 star" head into a laminated curly maple resonator with a Stewart-MacDonald armrest.

This one has a laminated curly maple neck and has a Mastertone double 'C' cut peghead with unique "Flying Eagle" mother-of-pearl inlaid into ebony. The fretboard is ebony and has the classic "Flying-Eagle" inlay pattern in mother-of pearl.

The strings run from Stewart-MacDonald Waverly 2-ring tuning pegs and Schaller D-tuners over a bone & mother-of-pearl nut to a J. T. Clark bridge and Kershner tailpiece.

Like its siblings The Favourite and Flying Eagle I this banjo is loud and articulate at all positions on the neck and responds well from the lightest to heaviest touch.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection

22 Wreath

This was the last banjo that John completed and while it's a stunning finale to his building career - there is a stock of finished or part-finished componentry available to buy.

This banjo has a three-piece American black walnut & curly maple neck, providing visual contrast and un-rivalled stability. The peghead is cut in his favourite Mastertone double 'C' shape and laminated with ebony. This time however, the mother-of-pearl inlays are in the wreath pattern. This is his only example with this inlay system.

The pot assembly consists of an American black walnut block-construction rim with Stewart-MacDonald flathead tone ring, one piece flange, tension hoop and armrest.

The strings leave a combination of Stewart-MacDonald "5 star" and Schaller 'D' tuning pegs to pass over a bone nut, J. T. Clark bridge and finish on a Presto tailpiece.

The banjo has a "Remo" head and a visually stunning laminated American black walnut resonator. It is powerful and deep as might be expected from an instrument in walnut.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection

Necks

Selection includes maple, walnut and mahogany, veneered in ebony and rosewood



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection

Rims

Selection includes 4-ply laminated and block-construction varying from finished to specific diameters and fits to ready for final turning and fitting. Materials include maple, walnut and iroko.



John Clark "ELGIN" Banjo Collection

Resonators

Selection at varying stages of completion from bound and lacquered to laminated and unfinished. Materials include maple, mahogany and walnut.



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All instruments are complete with leather strap and hard-shell case. Many necks, rims and resonators are available (as illustrated by a small selection) at prices reflecting their stages of completion. All material and component descriptions are given in good faith only, and all descriptions of tone, sound quality and playability are ultimately subjective.

Please contact Robin Wallace of the Longway Bluegrass Band, on 07831 405811 with any enquiries.



