



Friends of Square Pianos

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On Hitching Strings to Undrilled Wrestpins

Drilled wrestpins (as original equipment) began to appear on English pianos from about the mid 1820s. They do make fixing the strings easier, especially modern steel strings. I used to wonder why pins weren't always like this, until I tried to drill a little hole through an iron rod using eighteenth-century tools...

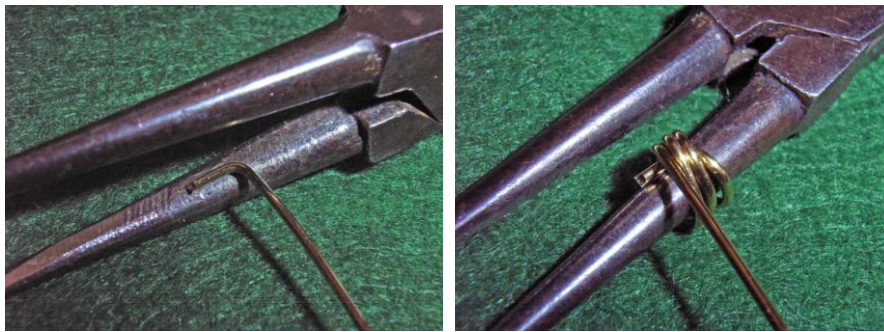
Many early pianos have had their pins modified (or replaced) but we like things to be authentic if we can, so we often have the job of hitching new strings to smooth metal pins.

The first thing to say is that it's best if the metal isn't smooth – old pins are usually no problem, and when I make new ones, the surface is left just as finished with a second-cut file in a lathe.

Cut the new string to the correct length. Match what's there, but as a guide the thinnest strings need about 8" on the pin, down to about 5" for the brass, and about 4" for the covered strings.

*There are several ways of making a secure hitch, and it's fun to 'collect' them. I'm not saying that my way is the right way, but it's simple, reliable, and I've **never** had a string slip!*

You will need a pair of round-nosed pliers. The aim is to wind about three turns onto one of the jaws, with a diameter somewhat smaller than the tuning pin. Make a little right-angle bend first (not too long), grip this between the jaws, and then 'turn and shuffle' to get nice neat coils, wrapping tightly round the cut end.



Then pull the string off the pliers, and try to push the nose of the pin through from the top. If you've done it properly, it won't go. So, holding the coils in your left hand, turn the pin anticlockwise to unwind the spring, pushing the pin as you go, until the top of the coils is at the right place on the pin.



Now put the loop (which of course you made first) onto the hitchpin, and pull hard. The wire should not slip, and the harder you pull, the tighter it binds. If not, the first coils weren't small enough – try again! Now just twiddle the pin to wind enough coils, and to bring the pin over the hole in the wrestplank. Note that it is very important that there are at least three turns below the cut end. If not, this will form a stress-point, and the string will break! Shorten if necessary. Maintaining the tension, tap the pin home and pull taut with the tuning hammer. As with most things in life, a little practice is a big help!