

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF ENGLISH VIOL MAKERS,
WITH BRIEF SURVEYS OF THEIR SURVIVING WORK

The following notes are for the most part simply compilations of information available in several standard reference books (omitting or amending anything known to be incorrect), notably the following:

- Willibald Leo, Freiherr von Lütgendorff, *Die Geigen- und Lautenmacher vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main, 6/1922) and Thomas Drescher, *Nachtragsband* (Tutzing, 1990)
- René Vannes, *Dictionnaire universel des luthiers* (Spa, Belgium, 3/1999; first published in 1951–59)
- Karel Jalovec (translated by J. B. Kozak), *Encyclopedia of Violin-Makers* (London 1968)
- William Henley, *Universal Dictionary of Violin and Bow Makers* (Brighton, 1973).

Where possible, these have been supplemented by more recent and/or specialized publications, including

- *The British Violin: The Catalogue of the 1998 Exhibition “400 Years of Violin and Bow Making in the British Isles”* (Oxford: British Violin Making Association, 2000)
- Michael Fleming, “Viol-Making in England c. 1580–1660” (Ph.D. dissertation, The Open University, 2001; also self-published by the author on a CD-ROM)

as well as others that are not specifically referenced here but can usually be identified by means of the citations listed in the database under “Literature” for particular instruments by the maker in question. In many cases, however, the only sources of information about a maker are the surviving instruments listed in the accompanying database.

ADDISON, William

The one surviving bass viol by this maker contains a label reading “William Addison in / Long Alley over against / Moorfields, 1670,” thus locating his shop only a short walk from those of Richard Meares and George Miller, both of whom were active at around this time in the neighborhood known as “without Bishopsgate.” A tenor viol formerly thought to have been made by Addison has recently been reattributed to the earlier maker Richard Blunt (see below).

Although Addison is mentioned in several modern dictionaries of luthiers, all of these entries appear to derive, at least in part, from a reference in Sandys and Forster’s 1864 *History of the Violin* to an label that they report having seen in a source they call “Hill’s MSS,” whose wording and date is identical to that in the extant instrument. Subsequent writers simply drew on the published statements of their predecessors, sometimes quoting the same label text but introducing minor errors; it seems very unlikely that any of them, or even Sandys and Forster themselves, had actually seen the viol.

In his doctoral dissertation *Viol-Making in England, c. 1580–1660*, Michael Fleming mentions two documents that may or may not relate to the maker of this instrument. One is a record dated 1676 of a payment to a musical instrument repairer named William Addis “for repairing and amending several of his Majesty’s musical instruments,” while the other records the apprenticeship of a certain Francis Nicholson to a carpenter by the name of William Addison in 1679. Fleming concludes that it is possible, but far from certain, that either of these men is identical to the viol maker.

ALDRED, Thomas

Thomas Mace, in his *Musick’s Monument* (1676), wrote that among viols by makers of the older generation “there are no better in the world than those of Aldred, Jay, Smith, ... Bolles, and Ross” [i.e., Rose]. Only one bass viol by Aldred is known to survive, with a label reading “Thomas Aldred / in Holborn / London, 1635” (though the date has also been interpreted as 1639 and even 1629). The viol maker Henry Smith also worked in Holborn at this time, as did Thomas Cole several decades later.

Surviving accounts reveal that in 1612 Aldred supplied the Duke of Devonshire with a chest of six viols, while half a century later the composer and singer Simon Ives bequeathed a set of nine viols by Aldred (consisting of five trebles, three tenors and a bass) to his colleagues at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, together with a “set of

Fancies and In nomines of my owne Composition of foure five and six partes.”

BAKER, Francis

Again there is only a single extant bass viol by this maker, whose label reads “Francis Baker in / Pauls Church yard / 1696 London.” He thus worked in the shadow of St. Paul’s Cathedral, only steps away from Barak Norman and Edward Lewis, both of whom had shops “in St. Paul’s Alley” at about the same time.

Some writers have suggested that Francis Baker was a brother of the viol maker John Baker, but since the latter did not work in London and the surname is a common one, this remains purely speculative.

BAKER, John

John Baker is exceptional among English viol makers in having worked outside London. Two instruments survive bearing his name, a treble made in Exeter in 1660 (the last dated English viol of that size from the historical period, unless one credits the posthumous date of 1667 found on the label of one treble by Henry Jaye) and a bass made in Oxford in 1688, which in style closely resembles the work of his better-known contemporary Richard Meares.

William Henley claimed, in his *Universal Dictionary of Violin and Bow Makers* (1960), that Baker “worked at Oxford, 1680–1720,” was the “son of William (worked 1673–1683),” and “made a few highly-arched violins,” but the basis for all of these statements is unknown. He also gives the text of a label reading “Made by / John Baker / in Oxford / Anno 1692” from an unidentified instrument; several other sources give the same wording for the 1688 bass viol, whose label actually reads “Jno. Baker / Oxon 1688” (which means the same thing using Latin abbreviations).

BLUNT, Richard

From this maker two tenor viols and a bass have survived. The latter’s label states simply “Richard / Blunt / in London / 1591,” while one of the tenors (now in Oxford) is said to have formerly contained a label reading “Richard Blunt, dwelling in London in Fetter Lane, 1605.” These dates make Blunt a contemporary of John Rose Jr. and the address given in 1605 places his shop not far from that of the later maker Thomas Cole, two of whose labels from the 1670s give his location as “near Fetter-lane / in Holborn, London.” The other tenor (now in Boston) was formerly attributed to William Addison but has recently been recognized as a virtual twin to the one in Oxford whose label was lost some time during the twentieth century.

Although Blunt’s name does not appear in any of the standard reference books on stringed instruments, Willibald von Lütgendorff does have an entry for Richard Blunff, the maker of a viol dated 1604 that was auctioned in 1759 at The Hague by the estate of Nicolas Selhof. Because the date of that instrument is only one year earlier than that associated with the tenor now in Oxford, this may well be the same person as Blunt, especially since it is clear that several other English names have been mistranscribed in the auction catalogue.

BOWCLEFFE, William

A tenor viol of unusual body shape, with sharply pointed corners and square shoulders, contains a label reading simply “William Bowcleffe.” According to Benjamin Hebbert, this is likely to be a modern replacement, whose “use of a pseudo-Elizabethan script may attest to the ... period of the original.” Hebbert suggests that the maker may have been related to a wealthy merchant tailor named William Borracleff, who died in 1601, and that the same person may also have made two currently anonymous treble viols of similar body outline. The tenor viol’s construction reveals a number of Italianate features, perhaps because its English maker was influenced by Italian practices, or else because it was actually made in Italy and the label does not belong inside it.

COLE, Thomas

No fewer than five bass viols survive bearing labels by Thomas Cole, four of them dated between 1665 and 1678. The earliest of these reveals that he initially worked “in St. Pauls Alley, London,” next to St. Paul’s Cathedral, the same street where Edward Lewis and Barak Norman would open their shops a quarter-century later. However, after this area was destroyed in the catastrophic Fire of London in 1666 Cole moved to a location “near Fetter-lane in Holborn,” as stated on the labels in his viols dated 1674 and 1678.

Several reference books quote the label in a large viola (whose current location is unknown) as reading “Made 1690, by Thomas Cole of London, on Holborn Hill, who selleth all sorts of Musical Instruments.” This provides three important pieces of information: first, that Cole remained active for at least a dozen years after the date of his latest known bass viol; second, that he made instruments of the violin family as well as viols; and third, that by 1690 he had risen from the status of craftsman to merchant, and now had a shop in which he sold “all sorts of musical instruments,” meaning not only his own but also ones made by other people, and of other types in addition to bowed strings.

In the course of researching his doctoral dissertation, Benjamin Hebbert has discovered that in 1674 Cole became the freeholder of two cottages in the parish of Heston outside London, which he then sold in 1689. Noting that this was just prior to the earliest documentation of Cole’s change in status from small master to retailer, Hebbert suggests that Cole financed setting up his own shop through the sale of these cottages.

Cole’s 1678 bass is unique among surviving seventeenth-century English viols in having been originally made with pointed body corners and rounded rather than sloping shoulders, while still retaining the C-shaped soundholes, flat back, and flush ribs typical of viols as distinct from cellos. It thus exemplifies the type of instrument illustrated on the left side of the first page of Christopher Simpson’s 1659 treatise *The Division-Violist* and its 1667 revision entitled *The Division-Viol*.

COLLINGWOOD, Thomas

Collingwood is not mentioned in any of the standard reference books on stringed instruments. His only known instruments are three bass viols dated 1680, 1686, and 1694. The two earliest labels reveal that in those years Collingwood was working as a subcontractor for the music merchant John Miller, rather than independently, because they explicitly state that the instruments containing them were “Made by / Thos. Collingwood / and / Sold by John Miller” or “Made by / Tho: Collingwood for / John Miller.” The third label, however, reads “Thomas Collingwood, London Bridge, fecit 1694,” showing that by 1690 the maker had established his own shop.

CROSS, Nathaniel

No known viols are wholly the work of Cross, who was born about 1689 and died in 1751. However, despite a lack of any written evidence it is believed that he was apprenticed to Barak Norman from approximately 1704 to 1713 and continued to work for Norman until the latter’s death in 1724, probably concentrating on violins and cellos. A viol dated 1713 bears both names, stating “Nathl. Cross now wrought my back and body,” perhaps in recognition of the younger man’s new status once free from his apprenticeship.

A second viol dated 1725 that, together with several violin-family instruments, bears a printed joint label, suggests that Norman’s widow Elizabeth hired Cross to complete a number of instruments that remained unfinished at the time of her husband’s death. However, the existence of a violin bearing Cross’s own label, also dated 1725 but giving an address in Piccadilly, suggests that he soon established his own shop, where over the next quarter-century (at a variety of locations) he produced cellos of his own design and violins either based on the work of Italian makers such as Stradivari or closely following the Stainer model.

Norman’s name also appears inside two twin treble viols of unknown authorship but probably dating from more than a century before his time. One was later converted to a viola, the other to a viola d’amore, in which state they remain; the latter is signed “Nathaniel Cross in Pickadilly near St. James Church London” (his address from 1725 to 1731) and it seems almost certain that he was responsible for the conversions that updated these otherwise obsolete instruments for continuing use in the 18th century.

CROSS, William

One bass viol survives with an undated label reading “All sorts of Musical Instruments / Made, Mended, and Sold by / William Cross / At the Bass-Viol and Flute, near Lincoln / College, Oxon....” Cross is known to have worked as a music seller in Oxford from 1711 to 1752, and it is possible he was only a dealer and not the actual maker of this instrument. Its table is made of three pieces of wood, a technique favored by Barak Norman but rare before his time. This, together with the absence of any dated English viols after Norman’s death (except those made by Frederick Hintz in the 1760s), suggests that the Cross instrument was made either at the end of the 17th century or during the first quarter of the 18th.

GIBS, George

An unusual bass viol with an back made of seven alternating dark and light stripes contains a handwritten label reading “George Gibs / London fecit,” followed by a date that at first glance appears to contain five digits: “15988”. Because the third symbol is probably not an ornament and the fifth seems to have been added later, the most plausible interpretation is 1598. In any case, the second digit is clearly a 5 rather than a 6, making this one of only a handful of English viols to have survived from the 16th century.

A possible sibling is an anonymous tenor viol with a striped back on which, as on the Gibs bass, the dark pieces are outlined in blond double purfling, a feature not found on any of the relatively few other English viols with striped backs. Dendrochronological testing yields a late 16th-century date for the tenor’s table, confirming that it was at least made at about the same time, if not necessarily by the same person, as the Gibs bass.

GILKES, Samuel

Samuel Gilkes (1787–1827) was a pupil of Charles Harris Sr. and worked for William Foster III before opening his own shop in 1810. As might be expected for a 19th-century maker, he built mainly violins and cellos, which according to Lütgendorff were much sought-after in the early 20th century. Two viols exist containing his label, one said to be dated 1815, the other 1826. Both have overhanging edges and apparently original tailgut buttons rather than hookbars to hold their tailpieces in place.

A repair label by William Gilkes (1811–1875), Samuel’s son, pupil, and successor, appears inside the bass viol by Rose now at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

GILL, George

A very small treble viol, later converted to a small violin, contains a label reading simply “George Gill,” which appears to be newer than the instrument itself but may be a reproduction of a lost original. The body was created using highly ornamented pieces of wood from a much larger instrument, whose decorative designs closely resemble those found on a festooned bass viol attributed to John Rose, thus suggesting an origin—for the putative large instrument whose wood was later reused in the smaller one—some time around the year 1600.

The process of transformation may have been undertaken in 18th-century France (perhaps to create a *pardessus de viole*), or alternatively during the first half of the 17th-century in England. In favor of the latter hypothesis is that an instrument maker named George Gill is documented in court records both in 1608/09 and in 1641, and that a George Gill who was baptised in 1574 and buried in 1664 (albeit in Somerset rather than London) had a brother who in 1616 described himself as an instrument maker. However, the instrument’s body is more than half an inch shorter than the next-smallest surviving treble from this period, a *Jaye* dated 1630 that itself is so small that it has been the subject of speculation regarding the tuning and pitch standard at which it was intended to be played.

HACKINGS, Peter

A single extant bass viol contains a printed label reading “Petter Hackings / London / 1621,” a name not found in any reference books or other documentary sources. Dendrochronological testing reveals that the table was made after 1680, meaning either that it is a later replacement, or the date has been misread, or the label does not belong to this instrument. Michael Fleming observes that it is “very atypical of English labels of that period,” and finds that there is only “a slight possibility that the back and ribs were made in London in 1621.”

HINTZ, Frederick

Hintz was a German immigrant who initially worked in London during the 1730s as a maker of fine furniture, attributed examples of which can still be found in modern museum and auction catalogues. A member of the religious group known as the Moravian Brethren, he was born in 1711 in Pomerania (now part of Poland); after returning to Germany from England during the period 1738–47, he was active as a missionary in Yorkshire before settling in London in late 1749 and opening a music shop “in Little Newport Street, the Corner of Ryders Court, Leicester-Fields.” He died in 1772.

Hintz’s business activities are documented by a number of newspaper advertisements and by his listing in a 1763 trade directory, where he is described as “Guittar-maker to her Majesty and the Royal Family; makes Guittars, Mandolins, Viols de l’Amour, Viols de Gamba, Dulcimers, Solitaires [probably psalteries], Lutes, Harps, Cymbals

[perhaps hurdy-gurdies], the Trumpet-marine, and the Aeolian Harp.” Today he is best known as a maker of English guitars, a kind of cittern, of which at least twenty examples are extant, mostly undated; the announcement of his estate sale reports that “it is allowed that the late Mr. Hintz, was one of the first [i.e., best] Guittar-makers in Europe; and that his instruments in general were very excellent.”

Although no examples are presently known of most of the other instrument types Hintz is reported to have made, in addition to English guitars his surviving output does extend to seven viols bearing dates from 1760 to 1764, including not only one bass but also four tenors and two trebles. The latter are especially noteworthy because, while bass viols continued to be played throughout the 18th century as solo or bass-line instruments, the viol consort repertoire had died out more than half a century earlier, leaving it unclear why anyone would want to make (or buy) smaller sizes of viols at this late date. Another surprising feature of these instruments is that the trebles and tenors are clearly made on two completely different models, with the body shapes of the latter appearing noticeably awkward. It has been suggested that Hintz was more skilled at building plucked than bowed string instruments, perhaps even being self-taught in the latter area; on the other hand, he may well have used subcontractors to supply some or all of the many kinds of instruments he offered for sale, putting his name on them as the seller even though he probably had not made each and every one himself.

HOSKIN, John

This maker is known only from a treble viol whose label reads, somewhat unusually, “John Hoskin made me 1609.” Because of the date, this instrument could possibly be the same as one exhibited in London in 1904, whose subsequent fate is unknown. In the catalogue it was described as a “Viol, Treble, English, six strings, London, 1609,” with the added comment that “The maker’s name on the label in the instrument is undecipherable.” And indeed, the first two letters of Hoskin’s surname are somewhat faded or smudged, though the remainder remains clear enough, together with the rest of the inscription—which, however, conspicuously does not include “London” or any other place name. (Some modern luthiers who offer copies of this viol give its maker’s name as “Hoskins,” but there definitely is no final “s” on the original label.)

HOWELL, Thomas

Howell was an inventor and instrument maker active in Bristol at least during the 1830s. In addition to a number of violins and cellos of his own patented design (involving a cornerless body with shortened and squared-off shoulders and C-shaped soundholes), his output included at least one viol of the same shape—unless this is actually a cello mistakenly renecked for six strings during the early 20th-century revival of interest in early music.

JAYE, Henry

Thomas Mace, in his *Musick’s Monument* (1676), wrote that among viols by makers of the older generation “there are no better in the world than those of Aldred, Jay, Smith, ... Bolles, and Ross” [i.e., Rose]. Currently there exist 22 viols (12 trebles and 10 basses) that contain labels by Jaye or have been attributed to him (some with greater confidence than others), a number greater by a factor of two than for any other English maker except Barak Norman.

The earliest known document concerning Jaye is dated 1606 and records his being “made free by redemption” [i.e., by payment of a fee] of the City of London by the Fletchers Company. Despite having thereby obtained the right to do business within the city walls, however, Jaye chose to establish his shop across the Thames in Southwark, which at the time was a center for theatrical and other kinds of entertainment.

Despite extensive searching, Michael Fleming was unable to find any information about Jaye’s birth or training, marriage or children, or his death. Working backward from 1606, Fleming suggested that Jaye was probably born about 1580, if not earlier, and that he had died by 1641 because his name is missing from a list of members of the Fletchers Company compiled in that year.

This hypothesis fits well with the period covered by Jaye’s extant dated instruments, all but one of which come from the years 1610 to 1632. The exception is a large treble apparently made in 1667, whose body and label are almost identical to those of another treble dated 1629. Based on present knowledge, the most likely explanation for this seeming anomaly is that viols continued to be made after Jaye’s death using the same patterns and techniques that had been used for the earlier instruments, and treating “Henry Jaye” as a brand name rather than the actual maker’s signature—though in this case it is surprising that only one such instrument survives. (However, the similarly-named violin maker Henry Jay who was active between 1744 and 1777 is not known to have any relationship of either family or training to the much earlier viol maker.)

LEWIS, Edward

Lewis was probably born in 1651, married Elizabeth Besouth in 1683, and died in 1717. Modern writers such as Willibald von Lütgendorff and Karel Jalovec praise his work as “excellent” and “outstanding,” respectively describing his workmanship as “impeccable” and “faultless.” His surviving output includes both violin-family instruments and nearly a dozen bass viols. Most of the latter are undated, but two have labels reading “Edward Lewis, in St. Paul’s Alley, London 1687”—making him a neighbor as well as an exact contemporary of Barak Norman—and one other was made in 1703. One of the 1687 viols has been described as “fundamentally a copy of the work of Richard Meares,” except that, as with all his other viols, Lewis preferred to make a two-piece carved table instead of following Meares’s traditional preference for five-piece, bent-stave construction.

Two of the extant viols were evidently unfinished at the time of Lewis’s death, when they were bought at his estate sale by Richard Meares Jr. and subsequently completed by him, with the result that they contain Meares’s label. Three other basses appear to have been converted to seven-string setups during the historical period, probably in France during the early 18th century.

In addition to these viols of classic design, there also exist at least three instruments, not included in this database, that have cello-shaped bodies and F-shaped soundholes but flat backs that slope inward at the top. Although none of these retains its original neck or pebox, they may represent a kind of hybrid or transitional instrument such as the one described in the unpublished notes on all kinds of musical instruments compiled by Cambridge professor James Talbot during the 1690s: “Lewis has a Bass Violin ... which has 6 strings: its neck is somewhat shorter than that of [the] usual B. Violin ... and [it is] tuned B. Viol way.”

MEARES, Richard (Sr. and Jr.)

Richard Meares Sr. was probably born about 1638, and while it is unknown from whom he learned to make musical instruments, we do know that at some point became a member of the Fletchers Company, one of the trade associations to whose members was reserved the right of doing business within the City of London. Despite this qualification, Meares established his shop just outside these boundaries, “without Bishopsgate, near to Sir Paul Pinders,” as stated on most of his labels. (Pindar [1565–1650] was a wealthy merchant and diplomat who built an imposing house in this district at the turn of the 17th century; its façade is preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum.)

As many as ten bass viols by Meares are extant, though the authorship of several has been questioned. The earliest label in any of these instruments was printed with “165 ” as the first three digits of its date, leaving the last to be added by hand; the latest confirmed viol bears the date 1679, though one more reportedly made in 1691 awaits examination and authentication.

During the 1660s Meares and his wife Sarah had three children, all of whom died as infants. Finally, in 1671, a fourth son, also named Richard, was born and survived to take over the family business, after serving a formal apprenticeship to his father beginning in 1686. During the following decade it was probably Richard Jr. who—most likely after the retirement or death of his father—was responsible for moving the shop (in two stages) from Vine Court “to ye North Side of St Pauls Church-yard ... where he sells all sorts of Musical Instrument, Books & songs, with Tunes Rul’d Paper &c.” In fact, the younger Meares soon redirected the firm’s activities towards not only the broader retail trade but also a significant involvement in music publishing, including works by well-known composers such as Bononcini, Corelli, Geminiani, and Handel.

However, he continued to identify himself with the dual titles of “Musical Instrument Maker & Musick Printer,” and a few extant stringed instruments do survive bearing his label, including a violin, an early type of viola d’amore, and two bass viols that were left unfinished by Edward Lewis at his death in 1717 and subsequently completed by Meares Jr. A trade card printed about this time advertises the availability of “all Sorts of Harps, Lutes, Gittars, Violins, Base Viollins, Base Viols, Tenor Violins, Viols d’amour, Trumpet-marines, and all other sorts of Musical Instruments Curiously made to the Greatest Perfection by Rich’d Meares,” though it is likely that at least some of these were actually made by anonymous subcontractors for sale through the Meares shop.

In 1700, soon after the move to St. Paul’s Churchyard, Meares Jr. married Judith Panton. Although no birth records have been found, it is clear that they had at least one son, also named Richard, who began to play a role in the family firm sometime during the early 1720s. It is not known when Richard Jr. died (or retired), but by 1749 Richard III had evidently added a completely different line of business making surgical appliances, for in an advertisement that year he described himself as both a “trussmaker, and instrument maker on Ludgate Hill,” just west of St. Paul’s Churchyard.

MILLER, George

Currently there are four bass viols attributed to Miller, two of which contain labels reading “George Miller in Vine Court without Bishopsgate London,” followed by a date. One label is dated 1669, while only the first two digits of the other date can now be read. Two more instruments have been attributed to Miller based on the similarity of their style, proportions, ornaments, and varnish to the labeled viols.

In the course of researching his doctoral dissertation, Benjamin Hebbert has discovered that Miller’s last will and testament is dated 1678, though it was not proved until 1684, which therefore may provisionally be taken as the year of his death. Meanwhile, a book published in 1676 was available for purchase at three music shops in different parts of greater London, including “George Miller near the Royal Exchange,” suggesting that by this time he had relocated his business from Vine Court and had become a merchant rather than just a craftsman.

Only four years later, in 1680, Thomas Collingwood’s earliest extant viol was made to be sold by “John Miller over against the Fleece Tavern in Corn-hill.” Because this tavern was in fact located quite near the Royal Exchange, it seems likely that by this time George Miller had been succeeded in business by John Miller (presumably his son of that name), at a location which the two men chose to describe in slightly different terms.

NORMAN, Barak

Norman is today the best-known of all English viol makers, primarily due to the extraordinarily large quantity of his instruments that have survived, including more than 50 bass viols (and two trebles) as well as lesser numbers of violins, violas, and cellos. He was born in 1651, and at the age of seventeen began a seven-year apprenticeship to William Hardin, a bailliff of the Weavers Company, although there is no evidence that he ever practiced, or even learned, that trade. Rather, he probably used this arrangement simply as a way of gaining membership in one of the established livery companies, which would give him the right to work within the limits of the City of London. (Similarly, both Henry Jaye and Richard Meares Sr. and Jr. were members of the Fletchers Company, and George Miller was a Draper.) It is unknown from whom Norman learned how to build stringed instruments, but a likely candidate is Richard Meares, a leading English maker of the previous generation whose work Norman’s earliest viols resemble.

In 1684 Norman married Mary Turner; after her death in 1701 he married Sarah Watts, who herself died in 1702. The following year he took as his third wife Elizabeth Seale, with whom he had two daughters and who survived him.

By 1690 Norman had established his own shop near St. Paul’s Cathedral, an area that was home to a number of other viol makers during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, including John Pitts, Edward Lewis, Francis Baker, and Richard Meares Jr. While specific documentation is lacking, it was probably in 1705 that he took on as an apprentice the sixteen-year-old Nathaniel Cross, who continued to work for Norman after completing his training, leaving to set up his own shop only after Norman’s death in 1724. This date essentially marks the end of viol making in England during the historical period, with the exception of one known instrument labeled “Barak Norman and Nathaniel Cross . . . fecit 1725” (which Cross probably completed for Norman’s widow, who continued to operate the business until 1730), and a small group of chronologically and stylistically exceptional viols made by Frederick Hintz during the 1760s.

A majority of Norman’s viols retain their original labels, dating from 1689 to 1723, while nearly all of the others can be securely attributed based on the presence of the words “Barak Norman London Fecit” stamped on the table as part of its floral decoration, and/or because the instrument’s back bears an elaborate inlaid design that can be read—when viewed from either the treble or the bass side—as the maker’s initials, BN. In body length they vary widely, from 60 to 73 cm (with about half falling between 66 and 70 cm), and thus clearly were not made on a mold. Nor are there any clear points of division along this continuum that might serve to differentiate a group of division viols from their larger relative the consort bass, or from the smaller lyra bass; rather, each instrument was probably custom-made to the size that best suited the stature and musical requirements of its original owner, a practice that was probably followed by most if not all other English makers as well. The tables of Norman’s viols are usually made of three pieces of wood, in contrast both to the earlier English practice of five-piece stave construction and to the two-piece design normally used for instruments of the violin family and many viols as well. Half a dozen Norman basses are currently fitted with seven strings, but none of these setups is likely to be original.

PITTS, John

Two bass viols survive with handwritten labels by John Pitts. The earlier reads simply “John Pitts in London 1675,” the absence of any address suggesting that in that year he had not yet opened his own shop. Interestingly, the table ornament on this instrument almost exactly matches those found on three viols attributed to George Miller, raising the possibility of some kind of relationship between the two makers: for example, could Pitts have been a pupil of Miller? The other label reads “John Pitts in ... / Pauls Church / Yarde 1679,” revealing that he was one of the earliest instrument makers to set up shop near St. Paul’s Cathedral following the great Fire of London, a decade or so before Edward Lewis and Barak Norman did so.

In the course of researching his doctoral dissertation, Benjamin Hebbert has found the inventory made immediately after Pitts’s death in 1685. This lists the contents of a sales shop (which apparently did double duty as a teaching studio) on the ground floor, with living quarters above, and a workshop with three benches on the top floor. Such an arrangement suggests that by the end of his life Pitts, like Cole, Miller, and Shaw, had become a merchant as well as a craftsman.

RASSETER, James

A single bass viol survives bearing a label that reads simply “James Rassester / 1656”; the maker’s surname might also be read as Rosseter. At this time he was evidently active as a small master because he gave no address for his own shop. The instrument’s table is probably a 19th-century replacement, further diminishing the amount of available evidence about its original maker.

ROSE, John (Sr. and Jr.)

Though much remains unclear about the life of John Rose, we do at least know that there were two instrument makers by that name, father and son, working in Elizabethan England. The former was active at least as early as 1552, and a decade later was described as having “a most notable gift given of God in the making of instruments even soche a gift as his fame is sped thorough a great part of Christendom...”

The 1615 edition of John Stow’s *The annales of England* reported that “In the fourth yeere of Queene Elizabeth [i.e., 1562], John Rose, dwelling in Bridewell, devised and made, an Instrument, with wyer strings, commonly called Bandora, and left a sonne farre excelling himselfe, in making Bandores, Voyall de Gamboes, and other Instruments.” As John Pringle points out in his 1978 article on Rose, it is unclear from this statement whether the father only invented the bandora in 1562 or also died in that year. Though documentation is lacking, the latter interpretation is plausible considering that by this time he had achieved international fame and is thus likely to have been born at least three or four decades earlier. In that case, the “Jhon Rosse Instrumentmaker” who was buried on July 29, 1611, is likely to have been his son. Better known than any of these references is the statement in Thomas Mace’s *Musick’s Monument* of 1676 declaring that as makers of a good chest of viols “the highest in esteem are Bolles and Ross” [i.e., Rose].

Currently ten extant viols (seven basses, two tenors, and a treble) are attributed to Rose, though his name appears in only four or five of these, not always accompanied by a date. In Pringle’s opinion, most likely all of them were made by the son, with the possible exception of the bass at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Although significant differences in body outline, soundhole placement, and decoration exist within this group of viols, that fact alone does not necessarily discredit any of the attributions. At a minimum, however, it seems that he (or they)—like Henry Jaye in the next generation—made two very different types of body outlines, one festoon-shaped and the other of the classic shape with four unpointed corners defining the central C-bouts.

SAINT GEORGE, George

Saint George (1841–1924) was born in Leipzig and studied violin in Dresden and Prague before settling in London in 1862, where he was active as a player of the viola d’amore during the early years of the modern revival of interest in early music. Shortly before the end of the 19th century he built two bass viols, one of which he called “The Dolphin” and the other “The Ram’s Head.” While the fate of the latter is unknown, the former survives and indeed sports a carved dolphin head atop the pegbox, as well as elaborate inlay on the fingerboard and tailpiece that also features dolphins. Otherwise, its decoration is in style of Barak Norman, with floral-inspired ornaments and double purfling on both the table and back; and indeed, Saint George is known to have owned a Norman viol during the 1890s, precisely when he was making this instrument.

Two inscriptions, handwritten in ink on the inside surface of the back, provide more information than usual on its origin. One reads “This instrument was made entirely by / G. Saint George (prof. & composer / of music), 39

Westtowne Park Road, Bayswater / Sept. 1895 / for his only son Henry, the incomparable / gamba player of the 19th century / G [monogram],” while the other adds “The Dolphin head, fingerboard, / tailpiece & ornamental purfling / were designed & executed by me / G [monogram].”

SHAW, John

Two bass viols by Shaw are known today, one dated 1673 and the other 1688. For most of the 20th century the former instrument was owned by W. E. Hill & Sons, who described it as “one of the finest pieces of English work we have ever come across.” Its handwritten label reads “Carved and Made by John Shaw / and sold by John Carr his master / at the Middle Temple Gate in Fleet / Streete 1673,” revealing that at this time Shaw was not yet an independent maker.

Fifteen years later, however, he used a printed label reading “John Shaw, Instrument-maker in / Ordinary to his Majesty; liveth at / the Golden Harp and Ho-boy, next door / to the Fountain Tavern in the Strand, / near the Savoy, London. 1688,” showing that by this time he not only had his own shop but had received a prestigious royal appointment as well. Surviving court records show that he was granted this newly-created position in February 1688, and later that year was paid “the sum of £5. 10s. for mending the King’s instruments...; £12. 10s. for a base violin and case; [...] £4. 10s for strings for one year; and £2 for bows, bridges and pins for one year, Michaelmas [= September 29], 1687 to Michaelmas, 1688.” This confirms that Shaw, like Cole, Miller, and Pitts, had by this time become a music merchant whose business had expanded well beyond simply making stringed instruments.

A decade later, he was praised as the premier musical instrument maker in the country: “But of all sorts of Musical Instruments in general, the Violin, the Base and Lyra Viol, the Harp, the Ghittar, the Lute, (even the Flageolet and Flute not altogether excepted) Mr. John Shaw, living near the May-pole in the Strand, is acknowledg’d by the most skilful in Musick of all sorts, to be a Workman in a great measure superiour to any that have been in this Nation.”

SMITH, Henry

Thomas Mace, in his *Musick’s Monument* (1676), wrote that among viols by makers of the older generation “there are no better in the world than those of Aldred, Jay, Smith, ... Bolles, and Ross” [i.e., Rose]; and the following year the publication *Tripla concordia* contained an advertisement offering for sale a complete chest of six viols (two trebles, two tenors, and two basses) made by Smith in 1633.

Currently three viols signed by Smith are known, a treble and two basses. Of these the treble is the earliest, with a label reading “Henry Smith over against Hatton House in Holbourne 1623”; this information is repeated with only minor variations of spelling or wording in the two basses, which are dated 1629 and either 1631 or 1637. This is the largest known English treble viol, though still much too small to be considered a tenor (and only a centimeter or two larger than comparable instruments by Henry Jaye).

The decorative pattern on the back of the Smith treble, featuring a diamond pattern of purfling at the bottom connecting to two slightly converging vertical lines either side of center joint, is also found on the 1629 bass—as well as on another bass viol traditionally attributed to John Rose, whose body dimensions and other design features are also virtually identical to the 1629 Smith. This raises the distinct possibility that the two basses were made by the same person, without entirely clarifying whether that is more likely to have been Rose or Smith; alternatively, perhaps Smith was a pupil of Rose, despite there being no documentary evidence for such a relationship. In contrast, the 1631/37 Smith bass presents a very different appearance, both decoratively and in its overall body outline, though its carved head is said to resemble that on the 1623 treble.

STRONG, John

Strong’s name is found inside a festoon-shaped treble viol, on a partially-illegible label (reading “Made in Som[er]set / by John Strong”) that Michael Fleming describes as “a modern insertion which presumably uses information from an original label, now lost.” Fleming tentatively suggests that the maker may have been the same John Strong who in 1616, together with the viol maker Giles York, was a witness to the will of an Oxford composer and viol-player named Richard Read; and indeed, the rest of the festooned treble’s label text states “given to D. Read by B— C—,” while in 1872 the viol was owned by a C. J. Read of Salisbury, perhaps yet another member of the same family. Fleming also notes that the wood used for the back and ribs of this treble is similar to that of a viol labeled with the name of George Gill, who likewise lived in Somerset.

TURNER, William

We know that Turner was active in the middle decades of the seventeenth century because his surviving instruments include three treble and three bass viols bearing dates ranging from 1647 to 1656. Using a variety of spellings, these give his shop address as “at ye Hand and Crown in Gravel Lane near Aldgate, London.” Two more trebles and two basses, though unsigned, have also been attributed to him based on their perceived similarities to the other six. This total of as many as ten surviving instruments is unusual for pre-Restoration England, equaled only by John Rose and exceeded only by Henry Jaye.

Three of the trebles have a heart-shaped rosette in their tables, a feature that seems almost to have been a trademark of this maker as it is also found on two of his basses, while two other basses incorporate a heart elsewhere in their decorative schemes. One of the basses has in the past been wrongly described as a *Viola di Bardone*, or even as a baryton, due to a set of sympathetic strings that are unlikely to have been original and have since been removed. Four of the five trebles were at some point adapted for use as violas, meaning that their ribs were cut down and their original necks and pegboxes replaced, requiring restoration in modern times.

It is possible that Turner also made instruments of the violin family, though none are presently known to exist. However, William Henley did state that “we have seen two examples purporting to come from his hands, guaranteed by a reputable firm of connoisseurs.”

WAMSLEY, Peter

Wamsley, who may have been a pupil of Nathaniel Cross, was born about 1670, married Elizabeth Cox in 1694, and died in 1744, when a published obituary stated that “He was reckon’d by most judges to be the best maker of violins and violoncellos that ever was in England.” Modern writers similarly call him “the foremost English maker of his time,” describing his violins as “beautifully stylised versions of the Stainer model, ... of exquisite craftsmanship.” He also made numerous cellos, as well as a smaller number of violas and contrabasses. After his death the business was continued until 1751 by his widow and son (also named Peter), after which it was taken over by Thomas Smith, probably one of Wamsley’s pupils.

In addition to instruments of the violin family, Wamsley’s surviving output includes a few instruments that may have originally been treble viols, though perhaps more likely violas d’amore of the early type without sympathetic strings. One of these, questionably dated 1753, was exhibited in 1904, at which time it had a six-string setup, but has since disappeared from view. A second, with a printed label reading “Made by Peter Wamsley at the Harp and / Hautboy in Pickadilly London 17..” (lacking the expected handwritten third and fourth digits to complete the date), has F-shaped soundholes but a flat back, unpointed body corners, and no overhanging edges; currently it has five strings but the head and neck are not original. A third, slightly larger instrument, likewise with a modern neck and head in this case provided with six strings, has flame-shaped soundholes and significantly deeper ribs, which formerly accommodated a second fold at the bottom as well as at the top of the back.

Although it is not clear that any of these are true viols, still less that there would have been any musical use or market for treble viols during the second quarter of the 18th century, they and their maker have been included here for the sake of completeness.