



EDWARD PAMPHILON: THE COMPLEXITIES OF ENGLAND'S PROLIFIC SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VIOLIN MAKER.

[UNCATEGORIZED](#) by [BENJAMINHEBBERTSEPTEMBER 4, 2018](#)

Edward Pamphillon is one of the most prolific makers of 17th century England, but his instruments fall victim to the vicissitudes of history and circumstances. Benjamin Hebbert explores the environment in which they were made, and their reputation over three centuries of use.



An extensive network of violin makers worked in the Essex villages of Clavering, Widdington and Little Hadham, half-way between the City of London and Cambridge along the ancient trade route that passed through Bishopsgate on its exit from the city. Outworkers supplying the London trade were common in the seventeenth century, with different regional towns becoming specialist centres for commodities ranging from textiles to clock components intended for resale in the London markets. Of these, Edward Pamphilon (born c.1646, died after 1685) appears to have been the head of a community of instrument makers supplying the London violin trade.

Edward Pamphilon is identified as a 'fiddle maker' in Parish records and is the only individual whose work has been identified from the community of makers to which he belonged. His name is also known from a trade token

inscribed “Edward Pamphilon = [illegible] / living at Clavring = His Token”, suggesting that he held the status of merchant, which may not have applied to other makers under his employment, so although there may be some deliberation about the various generations and families of makers producing instruments, if they were all producing violins and parts of instruments for Edward Pamphilon’s mercantile business, that would explain why we are unable to identify the various other hands that belong to that school. Although Pamphilon violins generally conform to a particular repertoire of shapes, styles, and a specific set of making techniques, there are continual differences from one instrument to another.

The Archdeaconry Court in Colchester contains the will of Hestor Pamphilon of Quendon from 1710 placing her amongst the members of the Dutch Church, suggesting that the Pamphilon family identified with a wider Dutch Huguenot diaspora. The extended family that settled around Saffron Walden included cutlers and clockmakers, all trades that had Huguenot contingents. “Dutch” is a word that had broader meanings in the seventeenth century, and could as easily mean German or Danish, as from Holland or Belgium. Nevertheless, his broad making style has uncanny similarities to some Netherlandish instruments of the period. The work of Johann Baptist van der Slaghmeulen who worked in Antwerp (Belgium – it’s complicated) in the second half of the seventeenth century in particular is uncannily close and easily confused with Pamphilon.

Violin making seems to have continued long after Edward Pamphilon’s death, for towards the end of the seventeenth century, Nicholas Pamphilon is identified as a violin maker. His house which in 1726 passed on to a violin making cousin, somewhat remarkably has retained the name ‘Fiddler’s Croft’ up to the present day.



Fiddler's Croft, home to the violin maker, Nicholas Pamphilon from about 1690 to 1726 and barely changed. Recently on the market – [have a snoop here](#). Many provincial manufacturers focussed on the middle part of the market, producing works at wholesale prices to be retailed in London, whilst masterpieces, be they clocks, furniture or musical instruments were invariably produced inside the City by craftsman-merchants focussing on prestige. Amongst the earliest evidence for Pamphilon's work, is an example with a Richard Meares label of 1682 inside it, and a record of them being retailed by Meares Clarke, an instrument seller in St Paul's Churchyard whose probate inventory of 1688 lists eight violins by him. Given the relative roughness of most Pamphilon violins they were obviously made in great number and in haste – the Meares Pamphilon sits in strong juxtaposition to Meares' own reputation as a viol maker of near-Stradivarian finesse, but the strong principles behind how Pamphilon made his violins results in extremely good instruments with a tone that goes beyond what their appearance would indicate. They have often been confused and even sold as moderate Italian violins – Testore, and similar that were also produced under these conditions. Fine work by the Pamphilon family is occasionally found, but it is by no means common (it may be by another maker working close to his formula, or it may have been intended for sale in places such as Cambridge where there was an affluent and musically minded population, but where no resident violin maker was known). Nevertheless, these instruments have always punched above their weight, and the occasional eighteenth century sources that mention them reinforce the idea that they have been highly regard consistently throughout their history:

**THE DAILY ADVERTISER, 14 JULY 1766:
TO BE SOLD, SECOND HAND, AT EVERDELL'S MUSICK SHOP, IN ST.
MARTIN'S COURT, NEXT CRANBOURNE-ALLEY, A FINE TON'D DOUBLE**

KEY'D HARPSICHORD, AND THREE SPINNETS; FIVE VIOLIN DEGAMBOS, FOUR VIOLONCELLOS, ONE SEVEN-STRING BASS, FIVE LUTES IN GOOD ORDER, TWO FINE CREMONA VIOLINS, UPWARDS OF 100 YEARS OLD: TWO OLD PANFILLIANS, A STAINER, AND THREE FINE BARRET'S VIOLINS; A CHAMBER ORGAN BY TAX, AND SOME BIRD-ORGANS ...



Edvard Collier constantly painted violins and other musical instruments in his still life paintings that he produced in London. Although I would be cautious of making formal identification of a violin maker through a painting, the varied violins that he used have a satisfying similarity to a typical Pamphilon. In this painting of 1696 both the aspect of the violin soundholes and the robustness of the cello scroll do Pamphilon justice.

During the early 20th century as British musical taste pushed towards celebrating British music, enhanced first by composers such as Parry and Elgar, and later driven by a resistance to German culture influenced by the First World War, attention likewise diverted towards better celebrating English makers. Early work by Jacob Rayman and Thomas Urquhart has always been rare, and comparatively speaking Pamphilon work is relatively common, leading W.E. Hill & Sons and other protagonists of English work to

promote Edward Pamphilon as the leading maker of the period. Prices rose drastically, and at a time when a Klotz and a Gagliano were evenly valued, Pamphilons found an equal market through the marketing of the Hills. However, Pamphilons have numerous problems. They are prone to woodworm because of the kind of local sycamore that they are made from. Original pegboxes of English instruments tend to follow the same traditions of making found in viols, with desperately thin pegbox walls that are prone to breaking. I have seen some Pamphilons with eighteenth century replacement scrolls owing to their vulnerability, and by and large if they passed through the Hills, they would replace the scroll entirely either to provide a better scroll than the non-original one already on it, or as part of a rehabilitation of the instruments to allow them to endure modern use: I was recently shown a box of scrolls carved in the Hill workshop and in the bottom was a bundle of early 20th century – carved 'Pamphilon' scrolls prepared for future restorations. The Hills 'rehabilitation' went further than this, with the interior blocks and linings all replaced to give the instruments modern robustness, whilst they went to extraordinary levels to repair these instruments. Pamphilons can exhibit some of the most extensive and costly restoration, sometimes outweighing the perceived commercial value of the instrument. During the First World War, it is recalled that work was so slow for the remaining restorers who hadn't been called for War Work, that a lot of this kind of work was done simply to keep them busy.



“Hilled” Pamphilon labels produced around the period of the First World War. The Hills record one original label “Edward Pamphilon / April 3rd 1685”. This was the same time that the Hills drafted their “English Makers” manuscript, evidently feeling that the stirring of national pride would boost the market for great British instruments in the wake of the outcome of the war. The resulting interest in Pamphilon’s work confuses matters somewhat, since many Pamphilon instruments had been mislabelled, and some presumably had no label to begin with. With ethics in mind, the Hills produced manuscript labels that they inserted into the violins that they sold, invariably dated 1668 or 1669, but with the advent of dendrochronology the labels – written on thick ribbed paper – are contradicted by the youngest tree ring dates: The Edward Pamphilon type of violin continued to be produced into the eighteenth century. I have seen numerous examples with authentic labels for John Hare a reseller at the Royal Exchange and famous music publisher, all dated around 1706 to 1712. These would seem to be made by Nicholas and Francis Pamphilon, the identified makers working at this time. In terms of modern market value, Hilled Pamphilons constitute the majority of what exists, whilst most others have at least lost their original head. Prices reflect an acceptance in the market that this is the baseline of what constitutes a good Pamphilon.







A Violin by Edward Pamphilon, circa 1685: This example, (which is presently for sale – email: violins@hebberts.com) remains untouched by W.E. Hill & Sons, which is a rarity in itself, although Hilled Pamphilon scrolls are so prevalent that a later restorer copied a Hill Scroll during the restoration of it. The instrument is presented in baroque state, and the restorer has been careful enough to re-institute the through-neck that the instrument originally had. The ribs are inset into shallow grooves in the back of the violin, and as is usual on restored Pamphilons, the front has been half-edged. Although it is not necessary to put grooves in the top of an instrument when making it, this appears to have been Pamphilon's standard method, though we only ever see evidence from it in the form of the necessary restorations after the top has come off.



A shallow groove is visible in the corners on the back, into which the ribs are placed. Although this is thought to be a common early English trait, in practice few other makers except for Pamphilon apply it, but it is common practice amongst Netherlandish makers.

Writers on English violins praise Pamphilon for his Brescian influence, which is a difficult comment to justify without further detail. What they are referring to is the way that the arching rises directly up from the Purfling line, and as a result of the lack of fluting around the edges, the arching resolves itself proportionately by flattening out. It is for this reason that the comment often seems ludicrous when compared to photographs of instruments, but is actually a subtle and astute observation. This in turn leads to the soundholes being placed towards the edge of the instrument, so that they can be seated on the inclining part of the arch. The slight undercutting of the soundholes is also a feature that violin experts recognise as Brescian, although English viol makers used the technique, so there is no particular reason to attribute it to one influence over the other.

Towards the centre of the instrument there is a slight 'pinch' to the waist, something that is often identified as a Stainer trait. In fact, I have seen this on earlier instruments than Stainer, and as a feature it seems to extend from

Füssen makers of the mid-to-early seventeenth century, thence spreading through a good deal of Northern European making. (A few Testores do it too). The overall stockiness of the violin, which is characteristic of Pamphilons work exacerbates the sense of width of the instrument, whilst the dog-legged soundholes fit well with the sense of breadth. This type, with the lower circle much further from the main body of the sound hole than the upper one seems to be a consistent feature of English making, appearing first – to my knowledge – in the Bassano violins of the late sixteenth-century, and still detectable in the 1730s in at least one cello by John Sexton. This violin proves to be one of the very few examples with a label that we believe to be genuine. In this case there is no label in the conventional place, and instead a small slip of paper attached to the treble c-bout rib just below the upper block. The squiggles seem to be a monogram of the initials “EP”, the “P” slightly lower in the text, which has been inscribed three times in a row. Such a “mark” falls well with seventeenth-century traditions where people would adopt a symbol instead of signing their name if they were illiterate, if their name was too common or simply out of fashion (Nathaniel Cross adopted a cross as his mark, Barak Norman applied a sophisticated monogram of his initials BN to his instruments). This gives confidence that this is genuinely identifiable as an Edward Pamphilon, and not the work of one of his assistants. Such use of a his mark is characteristic of the kind of markings applied by a ‘small master’, i.e. a craftsman working for the wholesale trade. It is designed as a secret mark that the maker could use as evidence of ownership in case of a dispute, and designed not to interfere with the rights of the retailer to sell the instrument under their own label.

