

Recreating a Pepys Recorder, a project of the Worshipful Company of Turners

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Music was the greatest love of Pepys's life. He writes with rich emotion about how it affected him, whether playing and singing at home with friends or hearing it during his frequent visits to the theatre:

‘...but that which did please me beyond any thing in the whole world was the wind-musique when the angel comes down, which is so sweet that it ravished me.... I could not believe that ever any musick hath that real command over the soul of a man as this did upon me: and makes me resolve to practice wind-musique, and to make my wife do the like.’ (27 February 1667/8)

Two months later, on 8 April, Pepys tells us that he bought himself a recorder ‘which I do intend to learn to play on, the sound of it being, of all sounds in the world, most pleasing to me’. But what kind of recorder was it, what did it look like and how did it sound?

Although certain instruments from the 17th century have survived and can be used as models by today's makers, frustratingly, there are no remaining examples of Pepys's, or any other 17th century recorders. Modern day recorder players performing 17th century English music have been obliged to use either a wide bore and hypothetical ‘Ganassi’ recorder from the previous 16th century, or a copy of a recorder from the 18th century made by Thomas Stanesby Jnr (Master of the Turners' Company 1739).

This was the catalyst behind an exciting new project launched in April 2021 to research and recreate the ‘lost’ sound of Pepys's Recorder in order to provide today's players and audiences with a truly authentic 17th century English sound. The project has been led by Melissa Scott, Master of the Worshipful Company of Turners 2020-22, in partnership with the project's Curator Ian Wilson, Professor of Recorder at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and Jack Darach, one of the UK's leading young woodwind instrument makers.

Pepys had a large library of music, including recently published scores by composers such as Henry Purcell, Matthew Locke, John Blow and Christopher Gibbons; and he records in his Diary meeting many musicians. 350 years on, the recreation of the Pepys Recorder provides an important addition to professional recorder players' instrument collections—enabling them to perform the beautiful English music of the 17th century's ‘distracted times’ with more authenticity than has been possible since the time of Pepys.

The maker is Jack Darach one of the UK's leading young instrument makers, and part of the new generation of woodwind makers now emerging across Europe. As a Turner's Company Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Jack trained with Jacqueline Sorel (Netherlands) and Tim Cranmore (UK). He now works from his Brighton workshop, producing a range of recorders including historical copies, modern re-workings of the extant Baroque models, and innovative new instruments that meet the demands of modern players. Jack explains:

‘If Pepys was with us today, I hope that the recorder I have created would be very familiar to him, and have the exactly the same tone and timbre he found so pleasing. This has been an incredibly exciting project and also very challenging. It required a very detailed physical and musical analysis of the instruments that have survived from the 16th and 18th centuries.

‘Pepys purchased his new recorder from Samuel Drumbleby in 1668. This was a time of great

change in the London's cultural life and particularly music. The recorder would have reflected this transition, so recreating an instrument of that time has required informed choices.

'We know that the recorder sound was loved by Pepys and would have exactly fitted with the music being composed by his contemporaries, and the scores from the late 17th century in his extensive music library. Given the influence of French music in London at the time (and certainly by 1673, when composer Robert Cambert came over from the French Court bringing with him Jacques Paisible—a recorder and oboe player), it is arguable that early French instruments, such as those by Louis Hotteterre (1647-1716), could have made it over to London.

'This informs the decisions I have made about the pitch and external style of the Pepys Recorder. I wanted to incorporate the various European flavours that made up the musical and instrument making scene at the time. While the external turning of the Pepys Recorder owes much to early Hotteterre instruments, the sound character is English, with a narrower bore and slightly higher pitch than the French instruments of the time. The last trait distinguishing the Pepys Recorder from the later Baroque recorders is found in the windway which, as is distinctive of instruments of the 1660/70s, is narrower with less taper over its course.

'Having decided on the tonality, pitch and external style of the recorder, the next step was to make a number of recorder prototypes to refine the basic design to create a mature instrument. Prototypes for each instrument were essential, as not everything could be decided, or designed, in advance of practical investigation. This was repeated for the development of soprano and tenor (or 'Voice Flute') recorders for ensemble playing of three or four instruments. The final step was to develop very detailed drawings for each of the three instruments.'



Left: Working on the head section, right: reaming part of the head chamber

One of the oldest Livery Companies in the City of London, the Turners' Company was already a guild in the 12th century. Some 200 years later, in the 14th century, Edward III decreed that 'wooden measures, as well as for wine as for ale' should be made only by 'turners' with marks of their own—and the medieval turners established the English 'pint' as an official measure. Late medieval turners were also making woodwind instruments—including recorders and shawms, with their characteristic conical shape at the end of the instrument.

In the sixteenth century, instruments made by turners had played an important role in the musical Courts of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. But the appeal of woodwind instruments was not confined to the royal Courts: in towns and in the country, in churches and homes of all sizes, low cost, easy to play, highly durable turned wooden recorders, flutes and pipes were very popular, providing welcome work for turners specialising in musical instruments. In 1604, shortly after his accession to the English throne, James I granted 'The Master, Wardens and Commonalty of the Mystery or Art of the Turners of London' the Royal Charter for the Worshipful Company of Turners.

This marked the start of a two-hundred year period, during which Masters and Freemen of the London Turners' Company played a dominant role in the development of the highest quality wind instruments—from early Baroque recorders, to the contrabassoon commissioned by Handel from Thomas Stanesby Jnr, played at the first performance of Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks in 1749.

In May 1635 William Shaw was appointed the seventeenth Master of the Turners' Company. As was the general practice at that time, he served as Master for two years (as has our most recent Master, Melissa Scott). Shaw was very active in taking on apprentices—fourteen are known, over a forty-year period. Seven of his apprentices went on to become Freemen of the Turners' Company, including Shaw's last apprentice—one Samuel Drumbleby, who started his apprenticeship on 3rd April 1648.

Apprenticeships were for a minimum seven years, but Shaw died in 1652 leaving Drumbleby without a master. It is likely that the last three years of Drumbleby's apprenticeship were spent with William Whitehill, Shaw's second apprentice, who became a Freeman of the Turners' Company in 1649 and was appointed Master in 1686.

Drumbleby became a Freeman on 5 April 1655—almost seven years to the day since he started with Shaw. Shortly afterwards, it is likely that Drumbleby set up his own workshop and business, as he took on his first apprentice later that year.

Shaw, Drumbleby, Whitehill and other known woodwind makers of the mid-seventeenth century lived in the small Parish of St Michael Crooked Lane, just north of London Bridge. This is where Samuel Drumbleby also lived as a child—his father, a spectacle maker, is recorded as living in St Michael's Lane in 1638 (and was buried at St Michael's in 1643).

It is possible that Drumbleby lived, worked and sold his instruments in St Michael's parish from 1655 as part of the woodwind-making community, until forced to flee by the Great Fire and relocate his workshop to the Strand.

The first entry in Pepy's Diary which mentions Drumbleby is Monday 11 February 1666/7:

'... so I past my time walking up and down, and among other places, to one Drumbleby, a maker of flageolets, the best in towne. He not within, my design to bespeak a pair of flageolets of the same tune, ordered him to come to me in a day or two ...'

Later that month, on 28 February, Drumbleby visits Pepys at his home in Seething Lane and introduces him to composer and court musician Thomas Geeting as a possible teacher for Pepys's wife Elizabeth. Pepys's familiarity with the quality of Drumbleby's instruments suggests that they may have known each other some time before Drumbleby is first mentioned in the Diary. Before the Great Fire, this could have been in the area of Crooked Lane (which was only around half a mile from Pepys's home in Seething Lane) or because Drumbleby was already established in the Strand.

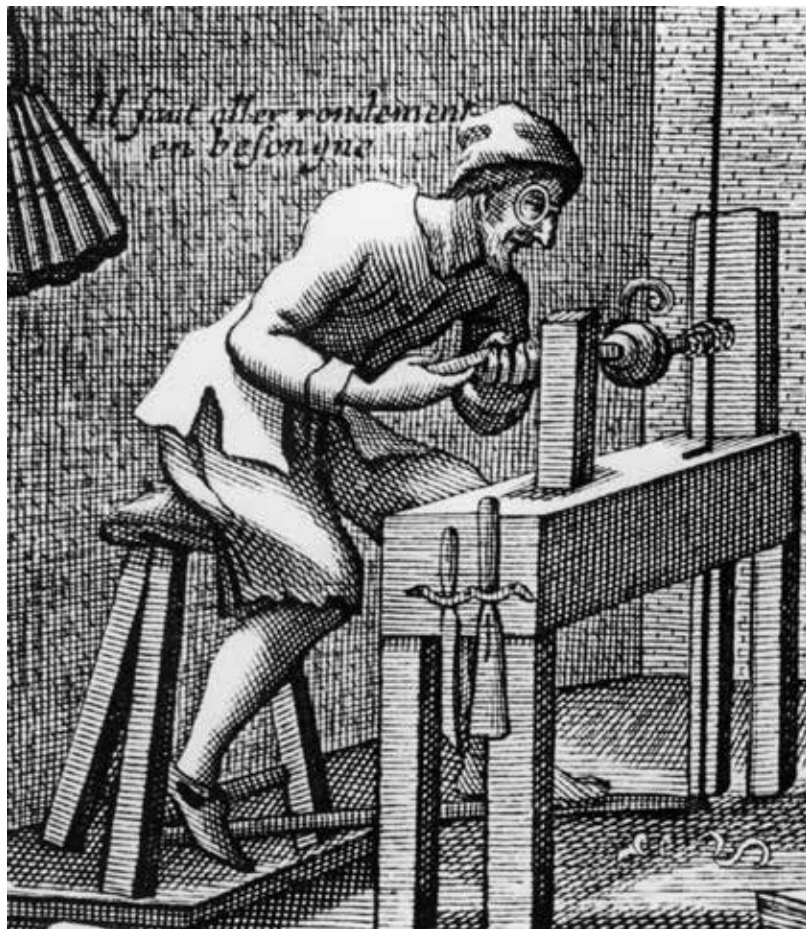
We don't know the exact location of Drumbleby's premises in the Strand in 1667/8. The Diaries make at least two hundred references to the New Exchange in the Strand – which Latham & Matthews (Vol. X) describe in terms we would now recognise as an upmarket mall of luxury boutiques. Pepys does not locate Drumbleby in New Exchange, but in its proximity. It therefore seems likely

that Drumbleby had his workshop elsewhere on the Strand, with sufficient room for his lathe, tools, stock of wood and finished instruments, and an apprentice or two.

The last Diary reference to Drumbleby is on 16 November 1668. With deteriorating eyesight and fears of going blind, Pepys stopped writing his Diary on 31 May 1669. Samuel Drumbleby died eight months later, and was buried at St Clements Danes on 11 January 1670.

But as we now know, the story of the recorder that Pepys thought ‘of all the sounds in the world, most pleasing to me’ did not end in 1669, 1670 or on Pepys death in 1703. The Pepys Recorder project has not only recreated Pepys’s own instrument (an alto recorder), but has also provided two complementary instruments—a soprano and a tenor recorder—in order to allow consort playing of the three instruments, or four with the addition of a second alto. The detailed designs for each of the recorders created by Jack Darach are owned by the Turners’ Company who will make them available only to the highest calibre of contemporary makers.

The ambition for the Pepys Recorder project is that these instruments become widely available to professional players, conservatoire students, and other musicians who want to play English Baroque music with an authentic sound.



For 200 years the Turners' Company played a key role in woodwind instrument making in London

	17th Century										18th Century										19th Century			
	Baroque Period (1600-1750)																				Classical Period (1750-1830)			
Key Events	1600	1610	1620	1630	1640	1650	1660	1670	1680	1690	1700	1710	1720	1730	1740	1750	1760	1770	1780	1790	1800	1810	1820	
Turners' Company Charter	1604																							
Great Fire of London							1666																	
Life of Samuel Pepys				1633																				
Samuel Pepys Diaries							1660-9																	
Purchase of Recorder							1668																	
Turners' Company Masters & Recorder Makers																								
William Shaw (Master 1635)				1635																				
Samuel Drumbley apprenticed to William Shaw					1648																			
Samuel Drumbley made Freeman of the Turners' Company						1655																		
William Whitehill (Master 1686)									1686															
Thomas Stanesby Jnr. (Master 1739)																								
Richard Potter (Master 1782)																								
William Henry Potter (Master 1805)																								
Composers																								
Christopher Gibbons		1615																						
Matthew Locke			1621					1676																
John Blow					1649			1677																
Henry Purcell																								
Monarchs	1603		1625		1649		1660		1685/89	1702	1714	1727									1760		1820	
	Elizabeth I	James I	Charles I	Interregnum	Charles II	II	William & Mary	Anne	George I	George II	George III	Geo.IV												