

World of Strings

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The Tubbs Bow

By PHILIP J. KASS



James Tubbs at work at his bench in the shop at 94 Wardour Street, London. This photograph of his last years dates from circa 1917

An Italian violin and a French bow — these have been the aspiration of generations of violinists. The modern era has broadened its sights and today's professionals have recognized the great crafts- and superb playing qualities of the bows by makers of the English school and by James Tubbs in particular.

The Tubbs family made bows and instruments as early as the 1800's, and five generations have practiced the craft. The first was William (the father) of Poplar, a small impoverished industrial community north of the docks near Stepney and east of the Tower of London. William Tubbs moved to London and worked there until the 1820's. His son Thomas is the first in the family whose work we can actually identify. He and his father were no doubt tradesmen who produced their bows without brand and sold them to the trade. Thomas worked most of his life in Lambeth, south of the Thames.

Thomas' son William traditionally is said to have been a pupil of Edward Dodd, who was a nephew of John Kew Dodd. On the death of Edward Dodd in 1851, William Tubbs bought Edward's inventories. The Tubbs', father and son, and Edward Dodd were neighbors, and there is a strong stylistic resemblance in their work to indicate their more intimate knowledge of Edward's work. These were hard times for bowmakers, since the removal of tariffs brought a flood of inexpensive German bows. Dodd had long ago given up bowmaking for his other great skill—that of string making. He was one of the few people who knew the art of wrapping strings in the modern fashion which was then just coming into vogue.

James, son of the second William, was the eldest of 11 children and was born March 25, 1835 at Rupert Court, one of those picturesque little alleyways which

bow maker in the early 1860's the qualities of a talented and experienced master were already evident.

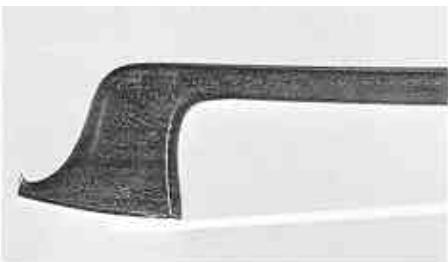
William Retford asserts that James was an unemployed textile worker at this time, and there is also evidence to suggest that he was a civil servant. What is clear is that about 1858 he began to work for W. E. Hill, producing bows to bear Hill's brand. He was in his early 20's and had a wife and a son to support. Whether he stayed with Hill until the 1870's, as Retford suggests, or whether he created bows on a piece goods basis is not known, but he did maintain a shop of his own during these years. Tubbs opened his first shop in 1864, at 5 Church Street in Soho. There he stayed until 1866, moving to 53 Greek Street, Soho and subsequently to 39 King Street, on the site of the present day Shaftsbury Avenue. His final move came in 1872-3, when he occupied the Wardour Street shop that he was to keep for the rest of his life.

give London so much of its character. It still exists, just a few short blocks from the old Tubbs shop at 94 Wardour Street. William spent his last years on 45 Rupert Street and later 1 Rupert Court. This dwelling adjoins the Blue Poles Public House, a centuries-old tavern which may bear the distinction of having served James Tubbs his first drink. Little is known of James' early years, but life could not have been easy for him, living in close quarters in a squalid section of town with his impoverished and multitudinous family. This notorious district served as a model for the poor quarters in Dickens' Oliver Twist and Bleak House.

He most certainly learned the art of bowmaking from his father, William, for not only do some of William's bows show James' hand but also James' early bows show the unmistakable styling of the father. When he made his first appearance as a

The early bows made for Hill are clearly the work of a master, and it is no surprise that W. E. Hill bows, made by James Tubbs, received awards for excellence at the London exhibition of 1862. Some believe that this was the cause for a falling out between Tubbs and Hill. Certainly their working relationship was difficult. James' proclivity for drinking he shared with his bowmaking predecessors; it could not have made him easy to deal with. He worked on his own despite his Hill employment. These factors may have led to his departure from Hill's shop. Whatever the circumstances, it did not prevent him from continuing to produce and repair bows not only for Hill but also for other shops of the time. We occasionally see examples of his work bearing the brand of George Adolphe Chanot of Manchester. These have occasionally borne the

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The head and frog of a viola bow made by James Tubbs circa 1880. In this bow all of the typical characteristics of his working style are evident. The head is broad and full, the model being the early work of Francois Tourte. The frog with pearl eyes and long ferrule and button are also typical of this period. This particular bow, a very pure and representative example, has metal fittings of engraved gold.

Tubbs brand under the frog.

It may be that economic considerations overruled any thoughts of artistic integrity for this young bowmaker, beginning a career under uncertain circumstances. Actually, he was following in the well worn footsteps of his bow making predecessors, not only in his own family but also the Dodds and Browns, whose bows were sold with no brand so that they might eventually bear those of the successful dealers and violin makers of their day, like Corsby, Norris and Barnes, Forster, Betts and others. Tubbs created something of a minor scandal in his later years when he placed his own brand directly over Hill's, but by then he was successful and could afford that luxury.

Early in the 1870's Tubbs settled on his own in the shop at 94 Wardour Street. In those days it was known as 47 Wardour Street, the change occurring in 1878 when Wardour Street was lengthened and renumbered. We have in our collection a bow box from those years, with the 47 crossed out and 94 penned in. It was in these years when his work began to take on the characteristics which we today recognize as the classic Tubbs bow.

The early bows were branded "J. TUBBS." Around 1878 he changed this brand to "Jas. TUBBS." The change in the brand has sparked much discussion, but there is a logical explanation for the change. Tubbs was obviously an artist, and proud of it. 7 of William's 11 children followed in the family profession, so that with William's death in 1878 Tubbs bows started to appear with a profusion of brands. Among these brands are W. TUBBS, E. TUBBS, C. E. TUBBS, and J. TUBBS. James had a brother John who made violins and bows and who around 1888 followed his brother Edward to New York City. The presence of John's brand

made it clear to James that he must do something to identify himself. The importance of this fact is indicated by James Tubbs' advertisements as late as the 1900's in which he stated that he was not connected with any other firm bearing the Tubbs name and that his Wardour Street shop was his only location, so that his bows would not be confused with those of his brothers.

The 1880's were successful years for Tubbs. Leading musicians like Wilhelmj and Piatti were using and applauding his bows. The upper class gentry, now coming to appreciate the qualities of a fine Cremonese violin, soon wanted a Tubbs bow to go with it, and flocked to his shop. His family was growing, and he was meeting with commercial success, perhaps the first member of his family to do so. In 1885 he won a Gold medal for his bows at the Inventions Exhibition held that year in London. He was made bowmaker by Special Appointment to H. R. H. The Duke of Edinburgh. One of the bows he made for this noble patron was for many years a part of the Hottinger collection, and came to us when we acquired the Wurlitzer collection in 1974. Of special interest, in addition to its splendid craftsmanship and royal owner, is his use of tortoise shell, especially rare in a Tubbs work.

These years saw the creation of the full bodied Tubbs bow which we know and recognize today. The heads were broader, smoother, and more elegant—no longer are they the lumpy heads of the previous decade and the Hill years. The long ferrules, metal headplate, and long buttons with solid metal caps became standard about this time. The sticks, as with virtually all of Tubbs bows, were round. A notable feature is the use of the wedgeless ferrule—a ferrule which allows room for only the proper number of hairs. Tubbs

used 110 to 150 hairs per bow. Retford traces this development to the earlier Tubbs and to the Dodds. On many bows this section has been enlarged by later repairmen so that a normal wedge can be used. James continued to make bows in this style until 1894.

During these years Tubbs adopted the system devised by W. S. B. Woolhouse, a mathematician and amateur musician, who believed that the vibrations of the bow were as important as those of the violin. The bow, then, must be perfect in weight and proportion in order to have the ideal vibrations. Woolhouse developed this logarithmically in an equation quite similar to the one devised by Vuillaume, a system based upon the study of Tourte's bows. This gave a generally 'French' character to the bows quite in keeping with Tubbs' taste, for he was a great admirer of the French masters and incorporated many of their structural ideas in his bows.

During the 1890's there were two major events for the family. The first was the entry, around 1891, of Alfred Tubbs into the firm, and its subsequent change in title to James Tubbs and Son. Alfred, born in 1863, was already active in the early 1880's as a bowmaker, but due to the close similarity of his work to his father's, it is difficult to tell when the hand of Alfred enters the work of this period. We know from Meredith Morris, who knew both well, that Alfred's forte was bow restorations, a task he could accomplish with unmatched skill, and so perhaps his role was handling this portion of the business, freeing his father for bowmaking.

The second major event was James' retirement, which occurred towards the end of the decade, when he had reached his 60s. With his son experienced in managing the business, he may have felt free to leave the responsibilities to him. His

home in these years was Ashford, near Staines, and he continued to visit the shop on an infrequent basis. We know that he continued to work, and the many fine bows made during these years undoubtedly came from the bench in his home.

To what extent either of these events influenced his major stylistic trend of these years is not known. This trend was the elimination of the small pearl dots facing the walls of the frog. This occurred in 1894, and we know it because Tubbs told this to Harry Dykes, the noted dealer, who was both a friend and neighbor in Soho. We can deduce several reasons for this; perhaps his sight, weakening in these late years, made this refinement a difficulty he was unwilling to undertake; or perhaps he simply felt that pearl dots marred the lines of the bow, and that they were more satisfying visually without them. There is a growing roughness in the works dating from these years and continuing into the later production, and one can agree that the streamlined appearance of the plain frog is entirely satisfying. Whatever other reasons he might have had he chose to keep to himself.

There were no further changes in his style until the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, when a cruel blow befell him—his beloved Alfred died on November 3, 1911, at the age of 49, leaving a 76 year old father and his young bride a widow. This sorry event brought him out of retirement to run the Wardour Street shop. As his wife had died several years earlier, his daughter-in-law cared for him in his declining years. He was a familiar sight during this final decade of his work, strolling the streets of Soho, or having a drink in a local pub with his friend George Wulme-Hudson.

Now we can see the mark of time and age, for the bows are marred by the ever increasing roughness of an unsteady hand. After lengthening his sticks in the middle years, these late bows return to the shorter lengths of his early works. Another change is the appearance of the now legendary birthday bows, in which Tubbs, as Stradivari before him, celebrated his advanced age.

James Tubbs career ended at the age of 86 on April 19, 1921.

This article has been excerpted from a history of the Tubbs family soon to be published in the Journal of the Violin Society of America

Second Fiddle

PART TWO

By PHILIP J. KASS

One of his Guarneris, along with a Hill fleur-de-lys bow that he favored, was bequeathed to the Library of Congress. It rests in most distinguished company, sharing the exhibition case with five Stradivaris and a number of Tourte bows which were donated by Mrs. Gertrude Clarke Whittall.

For a second violin, Kreisler's choice was a Vuillaume. This was the one he chose for many of his famous recordings that are now in the possession of collectors of historic record rarities.

Along with Kreisler's name we must add those of Sivori, Alard and Paganini in praise of the great Parisian mastermaker Vuillaume. Henryk Szeryng plays a Vuillaume as his second classic instrument.

The great works of J. B. Guadagnini have not been forgotten by eminent soloists. Many concert players have kept a 'J. B.' long after acquiring one of the renowned Cremonese instruments. Paul Kochanski, the Polish virtuoso, kept his two fine Guadagninis after obtaining excellent instruments by Stradivari and Guarneri. It is known that Efrem Zimbalist backed his Stradivari with a 'J.B.'. Isaac Stern keeps his Guadagnini with which he began his career.

In recent years, the work of two nineteenth century Italian master makers, J. F. Pressenda and Joseph Rocca, have come to the fore, and an increasing number of soloists are using fine examples of these two masters. August Wilhelm came to appreciate Pressendas and owned several of them. Rafael Druian, who plays the magnificent "Nightingale" Stradivari of 1717, also performs on a Pressenda when the mood occurs. Oscar Shumsky finds his fine Rocca a satisfying alternate to his Stradivari, the Rode of 1715. Alfredo Campoli has been so impressed with the craft of Rocca that he owns several of Rocca's early works. Also among his favored instruments are fine examples of Vincenzo Postiglione, a friend of his, and others by Giuseppe Pedrazzini and Giovanni Gaida.

Little publicized are the fine instruments of the 'Venetian' School that have long been recognized by our great soloists. Jasha Heifetz made his debut with a Carlo Tononi, while Albert Spalding began his career with a Montagnana which he kept long after he had acquired several Cremonese masterpieces. Zino Francescatti still plays the Sanctus Seraphin with which he made his debut.

Violists and cellists are less fortunate in their choice of solo instruments, for fine violas and celli are so scarce that many players are fortunate to have a single work of the old schools from which to choose. Yet some have the good fortune to own more than one. Lillian Fuchs has both a Gasparo da Salo and a Goffriller. Watson Forbes, in his day had a favored Guadagnini viola along with his Stradivari.

The warm and generous Gregor Piatigorsky was a noted collector and in his collection were two Stradivari celli, the "Batta" of 1714 and Baudiot" of 1725.

Jacqueline du Pre has that rare distinction of receiving two Stradivari, one presentation being the renowned "Davidoff" of 1712.

Some violists and cellists have come to appreciate the highly regarded qualities of the contemporary mastermakers. When William Primrose played a viola William Moennig, Jr. made for him in place of his Amati, the audience responded with equal warmth, unaware of the change in the instruments .

Lionel Tertis, believing his career at an end, disposed of his great Montagnana. However, when he resumed his career he decided to design a viola and helped to create the Tertis model with Arthur Richardson, the English violin maker.

When we hear a soloist in concert, can we know whether he is playing his beloved first choice, or his favorite 'second fiddle'?

Albert Spalding Remembered

In the realm of creative art, few works are preserved as well as those of painters and sculptors, in museums, libraries and private collections. Music performed by voice or instrument, in comparatively recent years, has been recorded for replaying, but the live performance of the concert artist ends with his last note on the stage. It is unlike the visual arts which may be viewed repeatedly and at leisure after its creator has left us. A case in point is our own, born in America, Albert Spalding, a concert violinist of renown during his lifetime, acclaimed around the world by critics, composers and connoisseurs of his day.

Aside from a few little publicized recordings of an early time in that technique, there is on view in the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, two elegant rooms taken from his home in Great Barrington. One is the music room and the other, the dining room. And there is a modest but elegant collection of Chinese artifacts, acquired during his concerts in China and bequeathed to the Museum.

Taking sufficient time while visiting the Museum, one begins to feel the presence and quality of the mind and character of the man Spalding and of his lovely wife Mary, and of the life they had.

He was a man of determination and courage, with a magnetic ability to make and hold friends wherever he traveled.

He was born in 1888 and lived until 1953, and had a picturesque career during World War I as an aide to the mercurial Fiorello LaGuardia, a congressman who ultimately ran New York City as its Mayor.

However, Spalding began playing the violin at age seven, and when he was graduated from the Bologna Conservatory at fourteen, he received the highest honors accorded anyone since Mozart. His American debut was made at Carnegie Hall in New York City, with the New York Symphony and Walter Damrosch as Conductor. This modest and unpretentious man went on to gain worldwide

acclaim in a quiet attitude, ever grateful for the gifts with which he was endowed, and felt fortunate that his world was appreciative.

His career coincided with that of Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifetz and other Europeans in this country who were of the Leopold Auer school.

Spalding was the American Violinist to appear at the famous La Scala Opera House in Milan. Among the five others who appeared before he did were Paganini, Sarasate and Kreisler. He was the first American Violinist to appear as soloist with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra. The other two soloists were Kreisler and Ysaye. He was a surprise and later a great pride to musical America.

Perhaps this issue of "World of Strings" may be in the hands of someone who knows of other Spalding mementos or possessions. Meanwhile, we have this interesting anecdote by the present owner of the Spalding Guarnerius del Gesu:

"In 1965 I acquired the Spalding Guarnerius del Gesu dated 1743. Aside from the unusual amount of original varnish, one of the distinguishing features of this

Norman Carol, the present owner of the Spalding Guarneri, with William Moennig 111.



Albert Spalding at the peak of his career. A studio photograph that appeared in his publicity on tour.

violin is a prominent knot in the wood on its front. It has been said that Guarneri was not too fussy about his choice of wood, and certainly this proves the point.

In 1941 Albert Spalding premiered the Barber Violin Concerto playing this instrument with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy conducting. In 1966, shortly after I became concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra, by sheer coincidence, twenty-five years later almost to the day, I played the Barber Violin Concerto on the same violin, and with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy conducting. Someone remarked to me that the violin already knew the Barber Concerto and all I had to do was get it out!

Needless to say, it has been a great joy to play this remarkable instrument, and I am indebted to William Moennig II for his advice and assistance when I acquired this fine violin.

I have some recordings of Spalding playing "our violin" and not only am I thrilled to hear its sound, but also his beautiful playing."

For anyone interested in reading further of the life and experiences of Albert Spalding:

Rise to Follow—

Autobiography of A. Spalding,
1943 Henry Holt & Company

The Accompanist—

an Autobiography of Andre Benoit
1978 Paganiniana

My Musical Life—

Walter Damrosch, 1926
Scribners (short references to
Spalding.)

EXCEPTIONAL VIOLINS FROM OUR COLLECTION



GIOVANNI FRANCESCO PRESSENDA, Turin. 1842

For the serious player. We are pleased to offer this exceptional work by a great Italian master. This fine specimen was originally in the collection of Gioacchino Guadagnini, G. E Pressenda's first patron.



GIUSEPPE CERUTI, Cremona, c. 1810

Strikingly handsome both visually and tonally, this rare work by one of the last of the classical Cremonese was made in the shop of his father Giovanni Battista. Featured in the January 1951 issue of *The Strad*.

The editor of *World of Strings* would appreciate comments on this issue and some suggestions for articles for future issues.

A Bargain?

By WILLIAM MOENNIG 111

We receive occasional requests from those cautious and rightfully concerned enough to ask our advice about an instrument being offered for purchase by a "private" individual, or as someone humorously once described these private individuals as "suitcase dealers".

Invariably the first answer given to the logical question: "What has persuaded you to choose this instrument without more care?" is: "It could be a bargain" or, to borrow an expression often whispered or suggested in Exhibition Rooms of some Auction Houses, a "sleeper".

There are, however, in my mind at least, four vital points which one should consider when investing in a fine musical instrument:

1 Selection An established firm with the

reputation for acquiring fine instruments and bows for generations will invariably have a broader selection from which to test, compare, evaluate, and choose.

2 Repairs That firm's shop should be at the disposal of any instrument they offer, and an instrument in need of repairs or adjustments will have them completed before being shown to a prospective purchaser. There is the added assurance and confidence in knowing that the establishment will be willing to accept the instrument for any future repairs or adjustments. **3 Expertise** Expertise in the violin field, as in all fields, comes from the continuing study of the instruments in themselves. This can only be found in a firm which has not only constant exposure to the works of the great Masters, but of great importance today, to the less heralded and obscure works that are as yet to be fully appreciated.

4 Appraisals Purchasers of instruments from an established firm have the confidence that their investments are enhanced

and protected with that firm's valued Certificate of Authenticity and the added assurance that its knowledge, experience, and intuitive abilities enable it to offer realistic periodic re-evaluations. The buyer therefore, in purchasing an instrument, is assured that he is dealing with a skilled and reputable firm which stands fully behind its instruments and bows; which certifies and appraises them; and offers its wares properly repaired and adjusted, to enable a prospective purchaser to compare and choose from a number of instruments and bows in ideal playing condition.

We, at William Moennig & Son, pride ourselves on the quality and variety of our collection; on the excellence and dedication of our staff, and on our knowledge and expertise in judging, evaluating, and authenticating fine stringed instruments and bows.

We are dedicated to continuing to provide the courtesy, outstanding service, and professional concern which were introduced by us to the world of strings in 1909.