

THOMAS DODD

WRITTEN BY STEFAN KRATTENMACHER

Thomas Dodd was born in 1764 to Edward Dodd, a steelworker in Sheffield. Shortly after Thomas's birth, Edward moved his family to London where he became a bow maker. Although his sons John and James immediately followed their father into the trade, Thomas initially became a beer brewer, only later turning to instrument and bow making. In 1798 he employed two Germans, Bernhard Simon Fendt I and John Lott I, who went on to craft some of the finest double basses ever made in London while at the Dodd workshop. It was Dodd, however, who gave the instruments their signature varnish, the finest in London at the time: rich and transparent with dark red pigment over an amber ground.

His labels, including the one shown on the next page, proudly display the claim that he was *'the only possessor of the recipe for preparing the original Cremona Varnish'*. He seems to have guarded that recipe extremely well, given that after leaving his employ, neither Fendt nor Lott used a similar varnish on their instruments.

Dodd was also a successful dealer, bringing over several instruments from Italy (sometimes in separate pieces, to avoid the import tax) and applying his varnish to them. After the 1820s Dodd produced mainly harps and pianos in Berners Street.

MODEL

The bass shown here was probably made by John Lott I and is a good example of work from the Dodd workshop at the beginning of the 19th century. It was designed with round upper and lower bouts. The overall length of the body is rather short, while the middle bouts are also round and on the short side, giving a broad impression to the model.

As with the early basses of the Dodd workshop, there are no external linings. However, the joints of each corner are enlarged with a 15mm wide horizontal piece of rib, giving the corners a bold look.

MATERIALS

The table is made from four pieces of medium-grain spruce, while the back and ribs are of a slightly flamed maple. The scroll is of plain maple.

ARCHING

The Cremonese-style arching has a long upper surface in the middle of the table, and arrives in a full manner at the table edge.

PURFLING

For the purfling, Dodd used ebony for the 'black' and probably poplar for the 'white'. The strips sit rather far from the edge.

F-HOLES

The f-holes are short with a narrow shaft, round lower eyes. The style is elegant, fitting the model perfectly. The lower f-hole wings have a slight fluting.

SCROLL

The scroll is beautiful and elegantly carved, with small ears and only a slight volute. The small blackened chamfer is typical of both Lott and Fendt at the time. The pegbox has strong sides, giving plenty of space for the strings. Dodd used Baker-style tuners for this bass.

VARNISH

The varnish is dark red, over an amber-orange ground. It shows signs of wear in various places. ▶

Thanks to Inga Bryden for her help with this article

●
MAKER
THOMAS DODD
●
NATIONALITY
ENGLISH
●
BORN
1764
●
DIED
1834
●
INSTRUMENT
DOUBLE BASS
●
DATE
c.1815





