

A violin by George Craske, England 1847

Catalogue Number: RKT-0654

\$15,000

Labeled: “Vincenzo Panormo fecit Londres 1783”

Below this label, handwritten on the wood of the back:

“Fecit George Craske 1847, Repaired by T. Edmondson, Blackburn, Lancs. 1970.”

Handwritten on the wood of the front under the fingerboard:

“George Craske, Fecit 1847”

Repairs: Many repairs have been performed on this violin over its lifetime and these have recently been re-done or improved on. There are many repaired cracks in the front and the centre joint has been strengthened with cleats. There are patches in the front at the sound post and under the cracks at the lower eyes of the sound holes. The end blocks and bass bar have been replaced. The sides were broken in nine places and are now strongly repaired. The button of the back is original, but was cracked and is now repaired with a patch and fitted with an ebony crown. The peg holes have been bushed and the pegs re-fit. The neck was lengthened by a few millimeters to modern standards and re-set. A large amount of badly discoloured old re-touching was removed from the varnish and improved upon.



Condition: This violin is in very good condition after an extensive restoration and a new setup in our shop. All work is unconditionally guaranteed. It retains the evidence of age, playing and many old repairs.

Comments: This is a quite large violin with strong, slightly flat arching and produces a warm dark sound which is rich in character. It is in George Craske’s personal style with broad uneven margins and a robust character. The neck is original and slightly narrow at the nut.

There is extensive wear to the varnish from playing and much of the dark red-brown varnish has been worn off the front, though the back and neck show more original varnish. Overall it is a violin with a beautiful aged look and many legitimate marks from numerous players.

The character of the carving is typical of George Craske’s work as is his the choice of a one piece back. While much of the original interior work on Craske’s instruments was a bit carelessly done most of the elements which are important to tone are properly conceived. The sound of this violin is much admired and one can see why so many Craskes have been sold as Italian violins. Whether it was an attempt to deceive or a sense of modesty which lead George Craske to hide his signature under the fingerboard rather than put it on a label may be a subject of some debate,

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CRASKE, GEORGE.

Born at Bury St. Edmunds (England), 1795. His father (brought over from the Continent by the Duke of Grafton) was bandmaster of the West Suffolk Militia. Early in life young George showed a taste for violin making, and was sent to London to study with William Forster. Made instruments for Thomas Dodd and for the firm of Muzio Clementi. But the pedal-harp (then coming into fashion) sadly interfered with the violin trade, and became so serious that he left London and went to Bath. Here he met John Loder and Nicolas Mori (both renowned violinists) who encouraged him to make instruments for their pupils. Also made the acquaintance of Sir Patrick Blake (an enthusiastic amateur and friend of King George IV), who possessed a fine Stradivarius and Amati, from which Craske made many copies. Lived a short time in Leeds and Sheffield. Removed to Birmingham,

took a shop on Snow Hill, and remained there about 20 years. Resident at Manchester, then Salford, and finally at Stockport where he lived in complete seclusion for more than 20 years, allowing nobody in his workshop except a life-long friend of his (George Crompton) who subsequently did much to popularise the instruments. Retired to Bath, and lived upon the proceeds of his genius and financial industry. Died at the age of 93, 1888. Repaired Paganini's violin when that great virtuoso visited Birmingham. Forster said 'He copied Guarnerius so that people couldn't tell the difference and consequently were taken-in'. Craske never attempted to sell his violins except as his own make and it was no fault of his that unscrupulous dealers frequently disposed of them as genuine Cremonas.

Stradivarius and Guarnerius were both sculptors and painters; for, to use a Latinism, varnishing violins is strictly a pictorial art of the highest order, and Craske was often very successful in imitating the great masters in this respect. A good deal has been written about fiddle varnish by people of no practical knowledge or experience. To suppose that the bituminous substance called 'amber' (which is insoluble except in alkalis) is used for this purpose is as nonsensical as the idea that fiddle-strings are made out of cats' entrails. The term 'amber' merely refers to the colour.

No man, unassisted, ever made as many instruments as Craske. In addition to those he made for Forster, Dodd, and Clementi, his tremendous productivity amounted to 2,050 violins, 300 violas, 250 cellos, and 20 double-basses, the latter resembling magnified violins. According to George Crompton, the sum of £200 has been paid for a Craske—doubtless an astonishing bit of advertising puffery. Flattering testimonials concerning the tone were frequently showered upon him by eminent virtuosos, who also had no objections to self-advertisement which sometimes is the underlying reason for giving complimentary and high-flown panegyric to instruments they never use publicly.

Crompton acquired the whole of Craske's stock. Later, Hill & Sons were disposing of them for various sums ranging from £10 to £20.

Between creative genius and adaptive talent lies the gulf that for ever separates the artist from the manipulator.

The surest indication of artistic power is possession of that creative instinct, belonging only to those whom nature has destined to be the representatives of her highest gifts, gifts by which are evoked from out the varied conditions of being new types of feeling—revelations of beauty and grandeur that shall remain 'a joy for ever'.

The services rendered to the human intellect by the exercise of such endowments claim our highest homage. By their penetrative sympathetic power, mind is brought into communion with kindred mind; the spark of spirit once struck, flashes with lightning speed through the ranges of human endeavour.

If, according to the Chinese proverb, a sage is the instructor of a hundred ages, so an artist is the teacher of all times succeeding his own; as the instruments of Maggini, Amati, Stradivarius and Guarnerius, after holding the admiration of the world for several centuries, are still regarded as *the* models for all future productions, and possess that interpretable moral of being perfect. On such grounds Craske must be relegated to that of the clever imitator and manipulator. Of the mighty quartet of models mentioned above, that of Guarnerius exercised the most potent influence over Craske, although Stradivarius and Amati, claimed his attention at different periods.

Outline, arching, scroll, sound-holes, and all details beautifully done—workmanship betokens the unerring accuracy of eye and hand. But occasionally conceived what is known as his own model, and here he falls a little from the artistic standard of a real genius—there is something about the outline not altogether harmonious, and the peculiar (sometimes sudden) rising of the breast further emphasises this inharmoniousness. When the charge of extravagance is advanced against Craske it refers always to his partially original designs.

Varnish of his imitation instruments is superb, but the brownish-yellow preparation he put on some of his other productions is dull, thick, and lustreless, also applied without 'effect' except the effect of calling up the connoisseur's disapprobation. Wood is always good—often very beautifully figured. Tone generally disappointing particularly in quality and responsiveness, even the passage of time seems to add little maturity.

Complete stock of instruments left at death were purchased and some put in order by Hill & Sons, with label inserted as under:

Made by George Craske
born 1797 died 1888
and sold by
William E. Hill & Sons, London

- From "Universal Dictionary of Violin and Bow Makers" by William Henley

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“George Craske Fecit 1847”

Description: This violin has a one-piece maple back showing medium figure running horizontally across the back. The sides are of similar material while the head and neck are plainer. The front is of two pieces of spruce showing medium irregular grain. The fittings are of rosewood with an ebony fingerboard. The varnish is of a dark red-brown colour over a dark yellow ground and is in fair condition with extensive wear and re-touching, especially to the front and sides. There are numerous repaired cracks to the front, especially around the sound holes, under the fingerboard and near the saddle. There is a patch in the front at the sound post as well as patches to the cracks at the lower eyes of the sound holes. There are nine repaired cracks in the sides which have all been reinforced. The end-blocks have been replaced as well as the bass bar. The neck has been lengthened to modern standards at the heel and raised slightly. The button of the back has been repaired with a patch and fitted with an ebony crown. The peg holes have been bushed and the pegs refit.

Back measurements:

Length: 362mm. Upper bout: 167mm. Middle bout: 115mm. Lower bout: 205mm.

February 12, 2011