

# THE JOHN HARRIS BRISTOL TRUMPETS

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This is a revised version of a private research paper completed in 2019.



The Bristol trumpets were examined in March 2019 by Colin Bloch, having been made available by courtesy of Rachel Griffiths of the Lord Mayor's office. The trumpets are mounted in a closed glass cabinet along with other civic artefacts. They have no cases, banners or mouthpieces, and are in apparently excellent condition, free of any dents or damage. They are not used and it is not known when they were last used, but quite probably not within living memory. They may never have had much use at all and are in near mint condition.

## Inscription

Each trumpet is boldly embossed on the garland JOHN HARRIS LONDINI FECIT. The ornamentation of and around the garland is slightly different but similar in overall design. These may have been identical basic trumpets to which silver ornamentation (pommel, garlands, ferrules) were applied at a different time. There are no hallmarks. A later engraving 'Chamber of Bristol' appear on each bell just above the garland, suggested by Bristol City Council to have been added in 1800. Chamber of Bristol is probably a predecessor to the Bristol Chamber of Commerce.

## Material

The appearance of the trumpets is of tarnished silver. Some elements are undoubtedly of pure silver, such as the bell garlands, jointing ferrules, and the pommels (typically heavy as for English trumpets of this era). The tubing closest to the bell is held in place on each trumpet not by twisted wire, but by U-bolts with hexagonal nuts bolted through the bell rim which appear to be original.

As to the material of contemporary trumpets, Don Smithers<sup>1</sup> comments: "*..silver was chosen by royal dignitaries for a show of splendour and opulence, but the baser 'bastard' trumpets ... sound better and were preferred by solo players.*" A reasonable conclusion is that these were intended mostly as functional and perhaps military trumpets, of robust construction using 'bastard' brass, but with a pure silver ornamentation to the garlands, ferrules and pommels.

## Measurements

Weights: 857g and 865g.

Length: 1016mm coiled, 2200mm tube length.

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<sup>1</sup> Smithers, Don L *The Music and History of the Baroque Trumpet before 1721* J M Dent and Sons, London 1973

## Pitch and playing

The trumpets were both tested. They have a remarkably modern sound, perhaps ascribed to their weight and heft, and sound akin to a modern B-flat trumpet. They do not have the light and woody sound associated with contemporary accurate reproductions<sup>2</sup>. The weight difference of 13g is very slight given that they are not a matched pair. The pitch is midway between modern D and E-flat, probably D in its day at A=415.

## Mouthpipe and receiver

The mouthpiece receiver has an external sleeve. A modern Vincent Bach trumpet mouthpiece when inserted only just gained purchase within the leadpipe but without relying on contact with the outer sleeve. The step internally is about 8mm down and it is assumed that the original mouthpiece would have had a wider shank that would have been held by the external sleeve, which has a diameter of about 12mm.

## John Harris

John Harris is referred to in the literature as a noted English instrument maker, not as a silversmith. There is no reference to hallmarked work by him. Edward Tarr<sup>3</sup> refers to “*a pair of instruments each by Bull’s successor, John Harris (fl<sup>4</sup>. 1700-1720) ... are also preserved.*” but this is not a reference to these two trumpets. William Bull was a well-documented trumpeter in the King’s Musick and active between 1676 and 1707 as a player and maker.

Don Smithers<sup>5</sup> comments: “*It is questioned whether Bull’s successor was the early eighteenth-century brass-instrument-maker John Harris*”. There is also a record of “*One natural trumpet converted to a slide trumpet is that by John Harris (ca. 1715) at the Bate Collection in Oxford.*”<sup>6</sup> It is reasonable to conclude that John Harris was active in London as an eminent maker of trumpets from about 1700 to 1720, perhaps the successor or follower of William Bull.

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<sup>2</sup> The author’s frame of reference is a natural trumpet by Frank Tomes 1936 - 2011 of London, being a faithful copy of the J L Ehe III Nuremberg trumpet of 1746.

<sup>3</sup> Tarr, Edward *The Trumpet* Batsford, London 1988

<sup>4</sup> floruit = flourished, i.e. when working.

<sup>5</sup> Smithers op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Webb, John *The English Slide Trumpet* Historical Brass Society Journal

## Comment

The Historical Brass Instrument Society was consulted and Dr Arnold Myers commented<sup>7</sup>: *“The pair of Harris trumpets in Bristol is well-known; other Harris trumpets survive but not, as far as I know, a pair. The Bristol pair cost £21 17s 9d in 1715.”*

The National Archives’ website confirms that in 1710 £21 17s 9d would be equivalent today to £2,296.62 and would have purchased 4 horses, or 5 cows, or 243 days of a skilled tradesman.



*Part of the John Harris engraving, which appears to be impressed rather than engraved.*



*The pommels differ slightly*



*The garlands are slightly different, with one having a pie-crust edge*

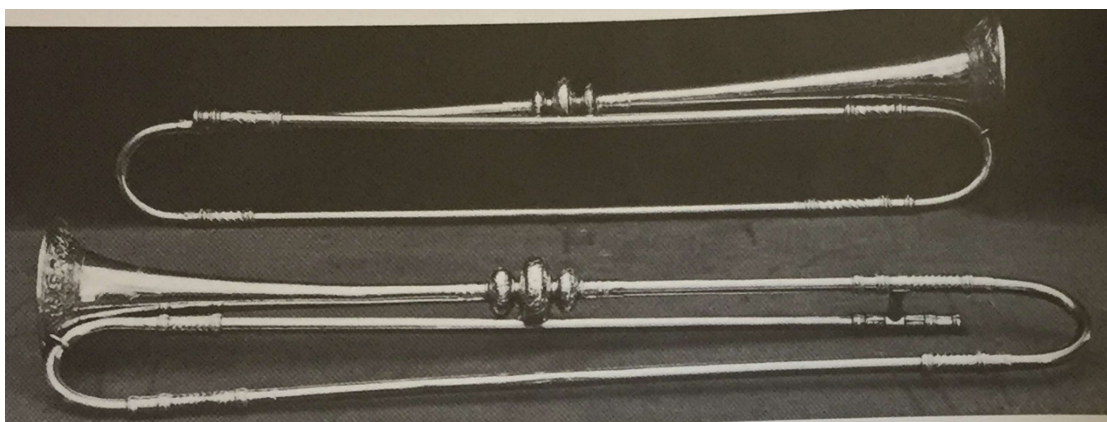
<sup>7</sup> Email 8.3.2019

## Information provided by Bristol City Council

43 *ottom* The City Trumpets, by John Harris, London, 1715 (no hallmarks). Silver; length 101.6 cm.

In 1715 the threat of a Jacobite uprising was so serious that a group of Bristol gentlemen, with the consent of the Earl of Berkeley, then Lord Lieutenant, formed themselves into two troops of horse and began to make preparations against an attack on the city. The troops each had a trumpeter and in order to encourage them the Council decided to provide them with two banners, two trumpets, two standards and two new coats, at the city's expense. It was also ordered that they 'be added to the City Musick' with salaries, thus bringing the complement of official musicians up to six. However, these were not the first trumpets to be provided by the city, as in 1672 a pair of trumpets was bought for use at the reception of the Judges of Assize.

Although not hallmarked, the bell of each is engraved in Latin with the name of the maker, John Harris of London. The decoration is of embossed garlands within a pie-crust edge, the differences in details suggesting that they were not made as a pair but drawn from stock. The inscription on the throat, 'Chamber of Bristol', was added in 1800. The trumpets are fine English examples of the early eighteenth century but since they are no longer melodic they have been replaced by replicas.



The **Galpin Society** has published in a paper that deals in detail with the Bristol Harris trumpets, and others.

*The Galpin Society Journal*  
Vol. 18 (Mar., 1965), pp. 14-22.



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