

Introduction

Good afternoon everyone. I'm Margaret Debenham and today I'd like to share with you some primary source materials that I've recently uncovered about the life and activities of the musical instrument maker Frederick Beck and the cabinetmaker and inlayer Christopher Fuhrloh during their time in London. Both of them were active in the capital from the 1760s onwards and most prolifically during the 1770s and 1780s.

Earlier researchers have established that Fuhrloh was born in Stockholm in about 1737. Having completed his apprenticeship in 1759, he joined another gifted cabinet maker, George Haupt, to travel first to Amsterdam and then to Paris, where they arrived in 1764.

Exactly when Fuhrloh then left Paris for London isn't known, but it was certainly not later than 1767 since there is an extant commode at Castle Howard which he signed and dated in that year.

Beck's date and place of birth on the other hand remain elusive, despite the best efforts of researchers to discover his origins.

The names of these two gifted craftsmen have long been linked by the existence of two beautifully constructed and inlaid commodes containing pianofortes both of which are signed by Beck, one dated 1775, which is now in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Merseyside and one 1778 in the Royal Ontario Museum, in Toronto.

But these lovely pieces in themselves pose an important question: Was Fuhrloh 'Beck's cabinet maker', as Colin Streeter suggested in the 1970s? Or could the reverse be true and did Fuhrloh commission or perhaps just buy in these pianofortes from Beck and place them within his decorative cabinets to add novelty value?

I shall suggest that the latter is the more likely scenario; so let's now consider the evidence.

Pianoforte by Beck, dated 1775, within commode
attributed to Fuhrloh, Lady Lever Art Gallery



With permission of National Museums Liverpool (© Lady Lever Art Gallery)

Here we see the beautiful commode attributed to Christopher Fuhrloh containing a pianoforte signed by Beck and dated 1775 to be found in the collection of the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Merseyside.

Clearly the cabinet is a breathtakingly beautiful example of a craftsman's art and deeply satisfying to the eye. But as others have already observed it's pretty impractical as a playable instrument and the pianoforte is also reported not to be a good fit inside the case.

So was it really likely, I asked myself, that a musical instrument maker of Beck's ability would have commissioned such an unsuitable cabinet to house his instrument? Surely his prime focus would have been to meet the practical requirements and desires of his musical customers?

It seemed much more likely to me that the second option was true.

Beck – Fuhrloh pianoforte, 1777, Royal Ontario Museum



ROM_2009_10911_13

With permission of the Royal Ontario Museum © ROM

And this is the second surviving commode containing a pianoforte by Beck, this time dated 1778 and housed within in another lovely example of marqueteer's art that again has been reliably attributed to Fuhrloh. This one is held in collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

I'm using this view of the cabinet in its open position, to illustrate that again the pianoforte it contains is placed very awkwardly for it to be practical as a playable instrument. So a similar argument applies.

Writing in 1977 J F Hayward presented evidence from the sale of Fuhrloh's stock in trade in 1787 which made clear that his output was not confined to marquetry, but included 'book cases, commodes, dining tables and secretaires.

So in this wonderful age of digitised resources, I began to search on-line materials, focussing in this instance old newspaper databases to see if any evidence existed that Fuhrloh was himself advertising musical instruments for sale.

Key Advertisements by Fuhrloh, 1776 and 1784

- 1 May 1776: Fuhrloh advertised for sale a cabinet containing a musical instrument
- 26 April 1784: He advertised for sale a 'capital barrel organ' in a mahogany case

Tucked away at the very foot of a page in The Morning Post of 1 May 1776 I discovered a tiny advertisement that provides a key piece of evidence. A rare Eureka moment!

It reads:

C. FURLOGH [sic], Cabinet-maker and Inlayer, No. 24 Tottenham court-road, has with other varieties of inlaid cabinet-work to dispose of, a neat and elegant CABINET, on a new construction, with a MUSICAL INSTRUMENT equally proper for a drawing or a music room. (The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser, 1 May 1776)

Here is clear evidence that Fuhrloh was himself selling pieces of furniture with musical instruments inserted inside them.

Moving on another eight years in the newspaper records and I discovered another notice in The Morning Post of 26 April 1784 in which Fuhrloh advertised for sale a capital barrel organ in a mahogany case. An extract reads:

A CAPITAL BARREL ORGAN, in a mahogany case, to be sold, has six barrels, three of them spiral, set to the most celebrated tunes, and full concert pieces; the movement is brass, and on a principle entirely new; has five stops, and is finished by a fine time-piece on the pediment (The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser, 26 April 1784)

He does not identify the maker of the barrel organ, but seems to me unlikely to have been Beck since I'm not aware of any evidence of him diversifying into making them at this stage.

Taken together, these two advertisements suggest that Fuhrloh was indeed commissioning or buying in musical instruments to place inside cabinets made in his own workshop,

Arnold Frederick Beck (- 1810)

- 1762: First appears in
Westminster Poor Rate books at
Hart-street (new finding)
- Also at this address in Rate
books 1764 – 1766

Moving on now to consider other new biographical source materials that have come to light during my searches, what more can we learn of the life and activities of these two gifted craftsmen during their working lives in London?

I'll begin by discussing my new findings for Beck and then move on to Fuhrloh

Regarding his arrival in London, I have discovered a Poor Rate book entry in the name of Arnold Frederick Beck that clearly shows that he took up residence in Hart Street, Covent Garden in 1762.

Hart-street, Covent Garden, Poor Rate Book, 1762

16 Frederick Beck	III	1	0	0
14 Samuel Johnson	III	0	17	6
16 Thomas Stephen for Ten	III	1	0	0
		15	1	3

With permission of © City of Westminster Archives

Note that the name of the previous occupant is crossed through in the entry. To the best of my knowledge no earlier entries have been found for him in London, and I would suggest this indicates that 1762 is probably the year he first arrived in the capital.

Hart street is now known as Floral street and a major thoroughfare running through Covent Garden.

In 1763 he took out an insurance policy at Glassonbury [Glastonbury] Court, Long Acre, just off Hart street. I have not so far been able to establish whether this was the same premises or whether the Hart street address was his workshop rather than his residence

Contemporary accounts of the area suggest that this was a fairly sleazy area at that time, with houses of ill repute around.

Perhaps rents were cheap there for that reason and that this was all he could afford when he first arrived in London as a young man, but this is no more than speculation on my part.

Beck moves to Broad-street North

- By 1767 Beck had moved to Broad-street (Sun Insurance Policy)
- Land tax records show that he maintained a property at this address until 1800

By 1767 Sun Insurance policies (identified by Lance Whitehead and Jenny Nex) show that he had moved to Broad –street north.

Land tax records confirm that he was situated in this street until the end of the century.

McLean Museum, Inverclyde: Beck square piano, 1769



With permission of © McLean Museum/Inverclyde Council

I'm moving along two years now to the year 1769 and the exciting finding of the existence of an extant square piano by Frederick Beck, which is clearly dated 1769 on the nameboard.

This instrument is held at the Inverclyde Museum in Greenock, Scotland and was donated to them by Mrs Abram Lyle, wife of the local sugar refiner way back in 1883. One might reasonably say that it has been hiding in plain sight, for all this time!

Once more we have the digitisation of records to thank for bringing it to light, now that the museum has listed its holdings on-line.

Michael Cole has kindly examined a number of images that the museum provided and he has confirmed to both me and to the museum that in his opinion the nameboard inscription is genuine and that the design of the instrument is very much influenced by the work of Zumpe.

Beck's square piano, 1769 - a view of the interior



With permission of © McLean Museum/Inverclyde Council

Here is a view of the interior of the instrument, which shows more technical detail of the construction.

To the best of my knowledge this is the earliest example of Beck's pianofortes that has been identified to date and it places him firmly alongside Pohlman as a rival supplier to Zumpe at this early stage of square piano production in London.

I hope this finding will be followed up by those better qualified than I am to appraise the technical features of the instrument. I freely confess that this lies outside my own area of expertise!

Beck – Coles Marriage Allegation, 1770

THE Condition of this Obligation is such, that if hereafter there shall not appear any lawful Lett or Impediment, by reason of any Pre-Contract, Consanguinity, Affinity, or any other lawful Means whatsoever; but that *Frederick Beck Widower*
and *Mary Coles Widow*

And lastly, if the said Marriage shall be openly solemnized in the Church, or Chapel in the Licence specified, between the Hours appointed in Constitutions Ecclesiastical confirmed, and according to the Form of the Book of Common Prayer, now by Law established, and the above bounden *Frederick Beck* do
save harmless and keep indemnified the above-mentioned Right Reverend Father in God, his Chancellor and Surrogates, and all other his Officers and Ministers whatsoever, by reason of the Premises; then this Obligation to be void, or else to remain in full Force and Virtue.
Frederick Beck

Bond DL/A/D/24/MS 10091E/83
With permission of © London Metropolitan Archives

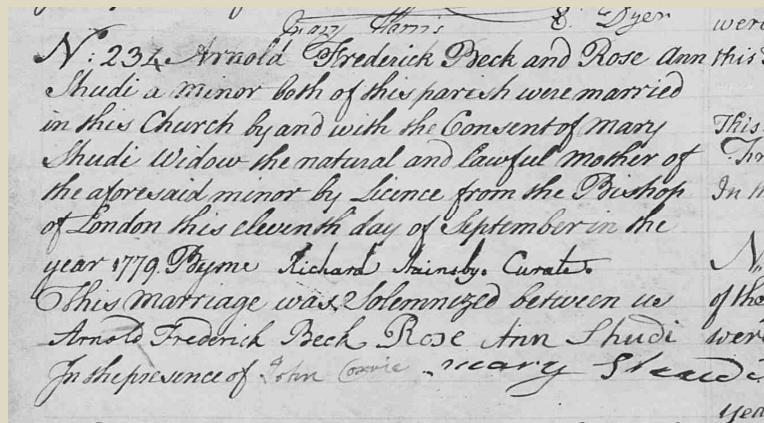
Moving on another year to 1770, the year after he made the instrument now held in the Inverclyde Museum, Frederick Beck married Mary Coles at St James The Less, Thorndike Street, Middlesex.

Here we see extracts from the Marriage Allegation document held at the London Metropolitan Archives.

Note especially that it describes both parties as widowed. This information is not shown in the parish register entry for the marriage, presumably because this was a marriage by special licence.

Since we now know that he was widowed at the time of his marriage to Mary, this raises the interesting possibility that he might already have been married when he arrived in London - and in turn that he might have fathered children by this earlier wife. And, who, you may ask, was the first Mrs Beck? I don't have an answer to this question as yet, I'm afraid.

Parish register: Arnold Frederick Beck and Rose Ann Shudi, 1779



Extract from the parish register, St James the Less, Thorndyke-street
With permission of © City of Westminster Archives

By 1779 it appears that Mary Beck must have died. I have found more than one parish register entry for a death of a 'Mary Beck' in London at about the right time, so cannot identify with certainty which one is for her.

And then, and then ... startlingly on 17 September 1779 a marriage allegation certificate records an application for the marriage of Arnold Frederick Beck, a widower and Rose Ann Shudi, a minor aged 15 years born in July 1764 and – a mere child by today's standards.

That document has already been discussed by others, so I've not reproduced it here.

There is however one interesting point to emerge from the parish register entry, this being the name of the second witness to the marriage. He was John Corrie, whom as we shall see, Beck later appointed as his Executor in his will.

There are birth records for seven children of this marriage, the first born was a son in 1781, who they also named Arnold Frederick. Sadly this child died in infancy.

The last child I have located is for Ameilia, born in 1795.

It's interesting that in all cases the father's name appears in the baptismal records as 'Arnold Frederick' rather than just Frederick.

Frederick Beck died, 1810

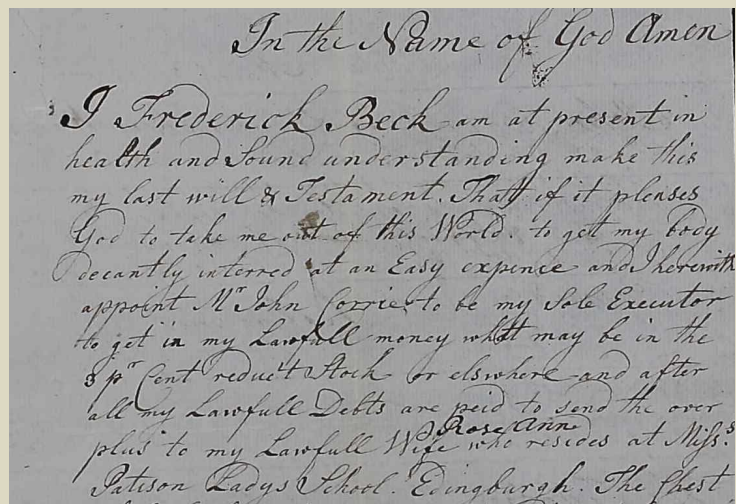
- 1800: Last known entry for Frederick Beck in the Broad-street rate books
- 1807: He made his will, 21 Feb. 1807
- 1810: He died 9 March 1810
- His original will, proved in the London Consistory Court, survives

The last entry for Frederick Beck in the Broad-street rate books that I have been able to confirm is for the year 1800.

And now I come to the final and for me the most exciting key finding I have identified for him, the image of his original will, which was proved in the London Consistory Court in 1810 and is held at the London Metropolitan Archives.

This firmly establishes date and place of death and provides new insights into his circumstances at the time.

Beck's will, 1810: top section



In the Name of God Amen
I Frederick Beck am at present in
health and sound understanding make this
my last will & Testament. That if it pleases
God to take me out of this World. to get my body
decently interred at an Easy expence and herewith
appoint M^r John Corrie to be my Sole Executor
to get in my Lawfull money what may be in the
3^d Cent redue't Stock or elsewhere and after
all my Lawfull Debts are paid to send the over
plus to my Lawfull Wife ^{Rose Ann} who resides at Miss^s
Pateson Ladys School. Edingburgh. The first

London wills: ref. DL/C/443; Will Number: 4
With permission of © London Metropolitan Archives

As well as bearing his original signature, the will appears to have been written in his own hand in its entirety.

He named John Corrie as his Executor and left some tools to him.

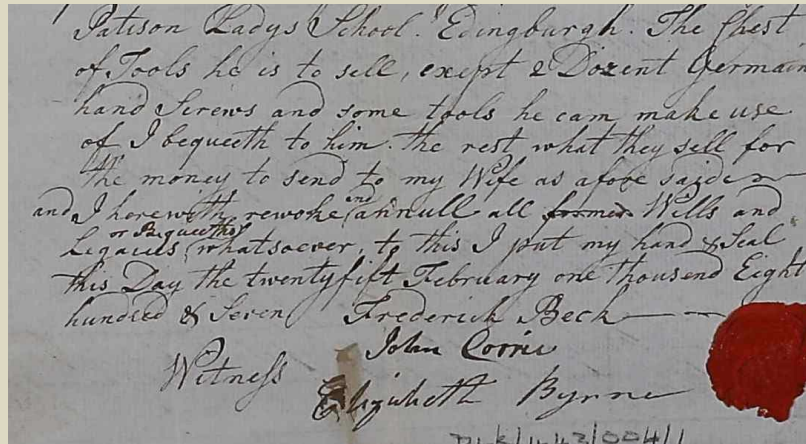
The fact that John Corrie was a witness at Beck's marriage to Rose Ann suggests there had been a close connection between the two men over the years

There is an entry for John Corrie in Broad-street north in the rate books of 1780 and one for Beck and Corey in 1790.. It therefore now seems likely that he is the Corrie listed in Doane's dirctory of 1794 as a pianoforte maker in Broad-street .

Beck names his only other beneficiary as his wife, Rose Ann, whom he states to be living at Mistress Pateson Ladys School, Edingburgh [note his incorrect spelling of Edinburgh here]

So why would this be, one wonders? Had Rose Ann left him because she no longer wished to be married to him? Or had he become so poor that she had been forced to take up a position to earn her own living?

Beck's will, 1810: bottom section



The first
of Tools he is to sell, except 2 Dozent German
hand Screws and some tools he can make use
of I bequeeth to him. the rest what they sell for
the money to send to my Wife as afore said
and I herewith revoke in null all former Wills and
Legacies whatsover, to this I put my hand & seal
this Day the twentyfift February one thousand Eight
hundred & Seven Frederick Beck
Witness John Corrie
Elizabeth Byrne

DLK/1143/004/1

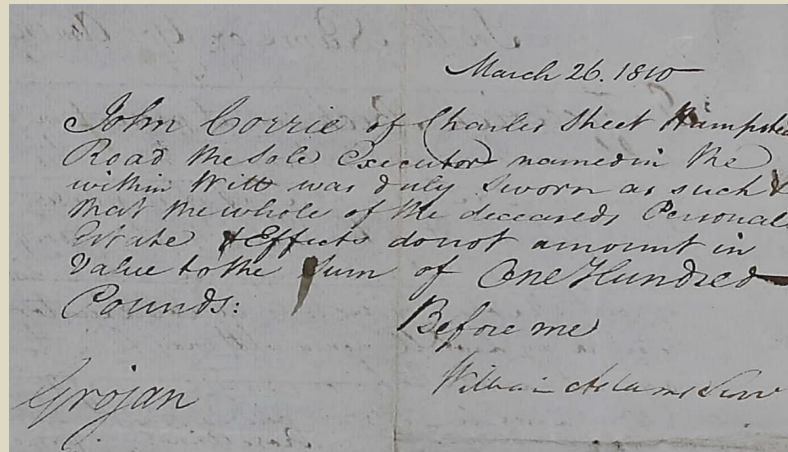
London wills: ref. DL/C/443; Will Number: 4
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Here we see the bottom half of the will – I have divided to enlarge the text to made it more legible on screen.

Note that he mentions a 'Dozent German hand screws'. Does his spelling perhaps suggests a German connection?

He has also reverted to signing his name as Frederick Beck and not Arnold Frederick.

Reverse side of Beck's will: top section



March 26. 1840
John Corrie of Charles Street Hampstead
Road the sole Executor named in the
within Will was duly sworn as such &
that the whole of the deceased's Personal
Estate & Effects do not amount in
Value to the sum of One Hundred
Pounds:
Grogan
John Corrie

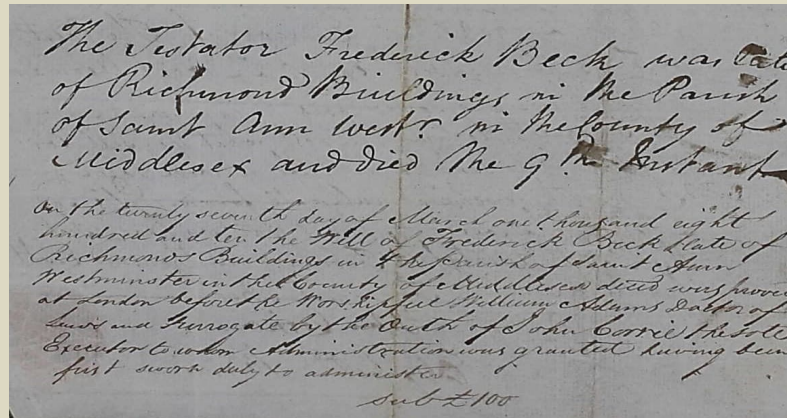
London wills: ref. DL/C/443; Will Number: 4
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The reverse side of the will also provides us with useful new information about both Beck and John Corrie.

John Corrie's address is given as Charles-street, Hampstead Road, so still within the pianoforte making area of London. However, I haven't been able to trace any mention of him in directories of the time, so this is another area ripe for further research

He testifies that Beck's estate amounted to less than £100, so sadly, even after all his earlier years as a successful maker, it seems that Beck died a poor man.

Reverse side of Beck's will: bottom section



The Testator Frederick Beck was late
of Richmond Buildings in the Parish
of Saint Ann West: in the County of
Middlesex and died the 9th March 1810
On the twenty seventh day of March one thousand eight
hundred and ten the Will of Frederick Beck late of
Richmond Buildings in the Parish of Saint Ann
Westminster in the County of Middlesex died was proved
at London before the Most Reverend William Robinson Bishop of
London and Surrogate by the Oath of John Corrie the sole
Executor to whom Administration was granted having been
first sworn to duty to administer
Sub E 100

London wills: ref. DL/C/443; Will Number: 4
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The bottom half of the reverse of the will reveals that at the time of his death Beck was living a Richmond Buildings, in St Ann's Westminster.

He died on 9 March 1810.

I have located a burial for a Frederick Back (probably a scribes error for the name) in the parish of St James, Westminster on 11 March 1810, which ties in with this reported date of death and this seems likely to have been our man.

So what, I wonder happened to Rose Ann? I have not been able to trace her in the census of 1841, nor have I found a record of her death, either in Scotland or England. Scottish death records are known to be sparse, so perhaps this is not surprising.

And what about their children. Amelia, the last born I located was born in 1795 and so would have been 15 at the time of her father's death. Was she in Edinburgh too? Yet more questions to which I don't have answers and await further research.

So what of Christopher Fuhrloh?

- Moved to 22, Gerrard-street in 1785, after a fire at his premises (*The Morning Post*, 17 Dec. 1785)
- In later years sold raw materials of his trade as well as finished goods

Moving on now to the life and activities of Christopher Fuhrloh during this period .

In the limited time available today I must confine myself to reporting two new pieces of biographical information I've located.

The first is an advertisement which appeared in *The Morning Post* on 17 December 1785, which establishes that the reason for his removal from his long term premises 24, Tottenham court road to 22, Gerrard-street. was because of a devastating fire.

It also confirms that he was making 'curious and inlaid Cabinets, Secretaries, Dressing Tables, Commodes, and other new invented and fashionable articles ' and that he was acting as a wholesale supplier, selling the raw materials of the marquetry trade to other makers.

Will of Christopher Fuhrloh, 1792

- Fuhrloh made his will on 14 February 1792
- He was buried 25 April 1792 in Westminster
- Will published 4 May 1792 in London Consistory Court

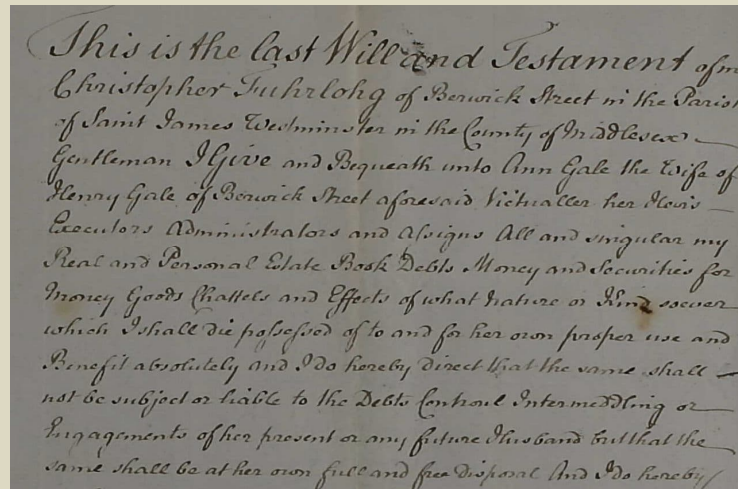
The second and most important key finding is the image of Fuhrloh's will, which shows that by 1792 he was living in Berwick-street,

As in the case of Frederick Beck, the original document survives in the records of the London Consistory Court, held in the London Metropolitan Archives.

His burial took place 25 April 1792 in Westminster

The will was published 4 May 1792 in the London Consistory Court.

Fuhrloh's will, 1792: top section



*This is the last Will and Testament of me
Christopher Fuhrloh of Berwick Street in the Parish
of Saint James Westminster in the County of Middlesex
Gentleman I Give and Bequeath unto Ann Gale the Wife of
Henry Gale of Berwick Street aforesaid Victualler her Heirs
Executors Administrators and Assigns All and singular my
Real and Personal Estate Book Debts Money and Securities for
Money Goods Chattels and Effects of what Nature or Kind soever
which I shall die possessed of to and for her own proper use and
Benefit absolutely and I do hereby direct that the same shall
not be subject or liable to the Debts Control Intermeddling or
Engagements of her present or any future Husband but that the
same shall be at her own full and free disposal And I do hereby*

London wills: ref. DL/C/431; Will Number: 198
With permission of © London Metropolitan Archives

Here we see the top half of the will , a simple one page document, with three witnesses.

It was made on 14 February 1792 and is clearly signed and sealed by his own hand.

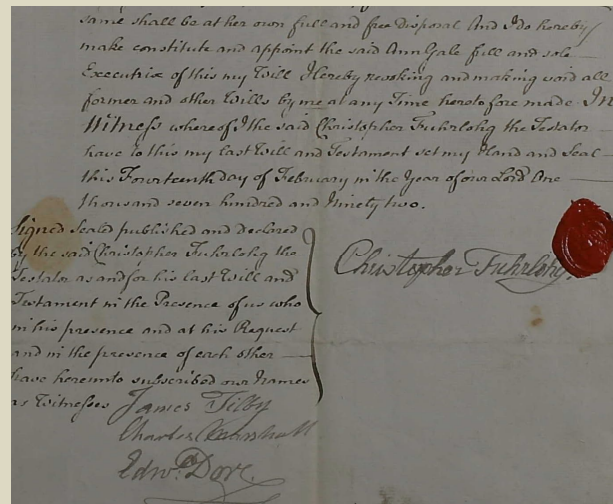
Firstly he states that he is living in Berwick-street

He names Ann Gale, wife of Henry Gale, Victualler, of Berwick-street as his sole executrix and leaves everything to her for her sole use, specifically stipulating that 'the same shall not be subject to the Debts, Control, Intermeddling or Engagements of her present or any future husband'.

So who was Ann Gale? Clearly she was a lady who was very important to him and one may surmise she had been caring for him in his final illness.

Curiously he makes no mention whatsoever of any of his relatives or former colleagues, as one might have expected.

Fuhrloh's will, 1792: bottom section

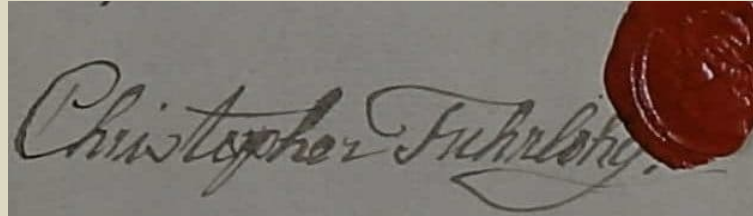


London wills: ref. DL/C/431; Will Number: 198
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Here we see the bottom half of the image of the will, with Christopher Furlhohg's signature and seal and the names of his witnesses

James Tilby
Charles Marshall
Edward Dore

Fuhrloh's signature on his will



London wills: ref. DL/C/431; Will Number: 198
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This has been a very brief run through my findings in the limited time available to me today.

I hope they've provided food for thought and that they will serve to stimulate further research into the questions they raise.

I'll leave you now with a close up of the image of Christopher Fuhrloh's impressive signature and seal on his will.

For more on my findings in this research, see my article:

Margaret Debenham and Michael Cole, 2018. 'Marquetry Cabinets containing Newly Fashionable Pianofortes made in Eighteenth-Century London: the cabinet maker's pianoforte – or the pianoforte maker's cabinet?' in *The London Journal* Vol.43, Issue 3, 2018: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 289-311
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03058034.2018.1425518>