

Broadwood square piano, 1788

Five octaves, FF–f³, double-strung single action, with straight brass underdampers. The wrestplank and wrest pegs are to the back, as per Broadwood's patents. 1571 x 521 x 226mm. The nameboard is inked in excellently preserved untouched calligraphy: 'Johannes Broadwood Londini Fecit 1788 Patent / Great Pulteney Street Golden Square.'

The instrument sits on a trestle stand, the elements of which have some decorative shaping and with some evidence that castors may once have been fitted. The case walls are of solid mahogany, except that the back is left unfinished and has an upper part of mahogany and lower possibly of alder painted with red ochre. The lid is solid mahogany. The front and side case walls and the lid have a simple ebony and holly (or boxwood) black and light string inlay measuring approx. 13mm in depth, and the lid has a simple black stringing inside. The hinges are let into the wood. The box at the left-hand corner of case has a replacement cover. There is a pine nameboard with red felt underneath, and a fiddleback sycamore box for the inked inscription. It has a simple, undecorated dust cover. 'N^o. 779' is inked to the top of the wrestplank, and there are inked pitches for all pegs as well as printed instructions for maintenance of dampers and hammers in English and French pasted to the back left-hand corner. '779' is also written in pencil on the dust cover and underneath the baseboard. There is also pencilled writing on the back, 'William N...' [Nunn?], along with a white wax inscription ending 'case 779' and including 'April 17.' The keyframe is stamped 'I M^cGill' with inked and pencilled '791'; key 61 is also pencilled '791', and keys are numbered in ink above and in pencil below. (There is, however, no evidence to indicate that the keyframe was originally part of a different instrument.) The mechanism is detailed by Jean Maurer (in the illustration below); Jean Maurer restored the instrument, restringing in brass (.70 reducing to .48mm) and iron (.52 reducing to .37mm), using wound strings produced using an adapted drill decreasing from .45/.65 to .35/.52. for the lowest 12 pitches.

Broadwood pianos need no introduction. John Broadwood (1732–1812) was a Scottish joiner and cabinet maker who married the daughter of a London harpsichord maker, Burkat Shudi, to establish what today is the oldest surviving piano maker (although operating primarily as a tuner with a royal warrant). After Shudi's death in 1773, the partnership with Broadwood continued with Shudi's son, but from 1782 onwards he managed the firm alone. In 1783, Broadwood obtained a patent for his 'new modelling' of the square piano – shifting the westplank to the back from the right (which better distributed the pressure on the bridge, replacing drop dampers with counterweighted brass underdampers with the damping pad comprising red cloth grasped by jaws at the end of the brass damper, and straightening the keys. Where the earliest English square piano that survives is by Zumpe and dates to 1766 (Zumpe worked for Shudi in the early 1760s), there is no record of Broadwood making a piano before 1778. Some writers (Wainwright, James) suggest that although Broadwood was interested in the development of the new instrument before this time, Shudi opposed diverting the company's concentration towards it. Michael Cole suggests the reason may have had to do with limited workshop space, the fact that harpsichords were still selling well and Shudi's instruments were prized, and to do with the status associated with the prestige that harpsichords brought (2005: 25–26). Before 1778, Broadwood tuned, moved, and perhaps took in square pianos in part exchange. After his journal indicates he began making pianos, possibly experimentally, in 1778, his earliest surviving square pianos date to 1780. His early squares tend to be plain, 'in a society where these rectangular pianofortes had become commonplace, they would have seemed unremarkable' (*ibid.*, 39); rarely was a pedal or any hand levers fitted. In the early years, Broadwood's journal reveal he sold his square pianos for between 20 guineas and 24 guineas, the latter being commanded for more decorative, inlaid and veneered instruments. By 1784, revenues for piano sales equalled those for harpsichords; by then, the rapidly expanding business had a network of trade suppliers, with Broadwood supervising his in-house finishers, and was developing its own network of agents who, as music instrument sellers, were given discounts to promote their sale of Broadwood pianos.



