

# The Back Page

Berlin, he is now working as a maker of new, chiefly period instruments.)

(At the most recent B.V.M.A. committee meeting, plans for just such a

"commented membership list" were finalised. Members will shortly be getting details through the post - Ed.)

## Questions & Answers.

### Bridge history

Can anyone help with information on the historical development that established the violin bridge as we know it today. I am writing a dissertation on the subject and have encountered a great deal of conflicting information!

Any pictures, access to actual bridges, or further information would be appreciated.

Fergus Anderson

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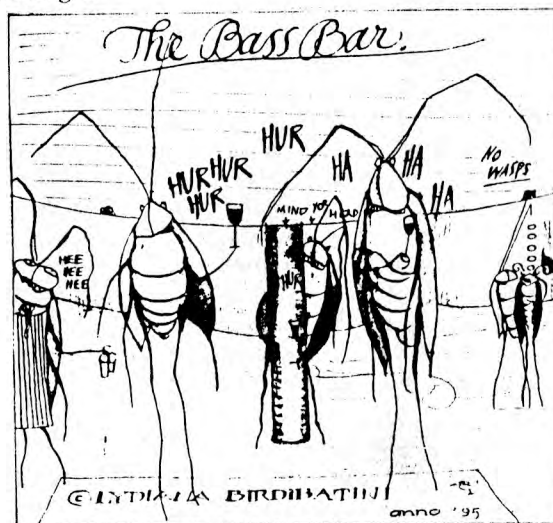
(John Dilworth, Roger Hargraves, Duane Rosengard and Stewart Pollens have been working on the definitive book on Guarneri del Gesu which is due for publication sometime next year. In effect the deluxe catalogue of the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum last year, it will include full-size colour plates of the instruments with the fullest possible technical and aesthetic analysis, complete technical drawings and a full account of the life of Guarneri. See article by John Dilworth - Ed.)

### Del Gesu Arches

I am presently studying violin making at the London Guildhall University, and at the moment I am working on the Del Gesu "Kreisler". Unfortunately the "Strad" poster of this model (which I am working from) is rather short on measurements and details.

I need the height of the table and the back. Also on the technical drawing, the long arches of both table and back appear to be identical. Is this correct? Can you help. Many thanks.

Jean Pierre Dondelinger  
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WOULD BORERS ANONYMOUS SEND GREETINGS FROM INSIDE YOUR VIOLIN!

# Newsletter

of the British Violin Making Association

Editor: Shem Mackey

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This Newsletter is printed and published by the British Violin Making Association. Correspondence and articles to go to the Editor, Shem Mackey, Winchester Wharf, Clink Street, London SE1 9DG. Contributors to this Newsletter express their own opinion and are not necessarily those of the BVMA.

Issue 1

B.V.M.A.

Sept 1995

## Editorial

At the last meeting of the B.V.M.A. we had present, as guest speaker, Anna Jenkins from Fauna & Flora International (F.F.I.), an organisation based in Cambridge, involved in worldwide protection of the environment. Her talk centered around endangered species of wood and how the musical instrument trade can play its part in being more eco-friendly.

It goes without saying that we cannot reasonably be expected to stop using ebony and pernambuco overnight (and neither are we expected to) but we all have a responsibility to look after the dwindling supplies of our precious hardwoods. The argument that we violin makers use very little, simply does not wash.

You may think that, as an individual, you have very little ability to facilitate change - this is certainly far from the truth, for as purchasers we have the power to determine the source of supply and thus, to a certain extent control it.

Question your wood merchant, find out his supply route, country of origin etc., try to determine whether or not his is a legal supply. It takes a little effort, but it can pay dividends as the message filters through. A lot of unscrupulous people are getting filthy rich on the spoils of illegal hardwood trading. By containing the trade to legal logging, only we can then more easily control the situation and hopefully avert the complete destruction of those species so

necessary to our trade.

There will be a report on Anna Jenkins (F.F.I.) talk to the B.V.M.A. in the next issue of the Newsletter due out in December. Any members wishing to provide copy for that issue should note that the deadline is November 9th. Those of you who sent in articles etc. for inclusion in this issue which have not appeared, fear not, they will be in the next one.

Many thanks to all who contributed, the amount of material was commendable considering the timing, in the midst of the holiday season, and the mixture of anecdotal, technical and potentially controversial seems just right.

You will notice that the Newsletter is still nameless - a situation we would like to redress by the next issue, if anyone has a good idea, or ideas, for a suitable name please send them in, and following acceptance by the committee we may even be able to come up with a prize of sorts!

Remember that the key to the success of this newsletter, and the Association, is in the effort that the members make to contribute something. That can be done in many ways, by a contribution to the newsletter, however small, or by suggesting ways in which the aims of the association can be promoted. Wherever your particular skill or interest lies, put it to work for the Association and get it working for you!

### DARTINGTON VIOLIN CONFERENCE 1995

The 1995 Dartington Violin conference takes place on the 16 and 17 September. Formerly the Tiverton conference the format remains substantially as before with a series of lectures interspersed with discussion sessions, plus a quartet in residence for the weekend. Speakers include Charles Beare and Sam Zygmuntowicz discussing Guarneri

del Gesu, Friedrich Meyer on varnish analysis, Professor Brian Harvey, and Peter Trevelyan on the collection and restoration of a quartet of instruments by the 17th.C. English maker, William Baker. Details from Brenda Blewitt or Angela Taylor on Tel. No. 01803 866688.

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

What an amazing year so far!!! From a small talk at last year's violin makers Christmas social evening in London, here we are, a fully fledged association with over 125 members.

Although a lot of people were suggesting, at the beginning, to take it slowly, we were all taken over by the enthusiasm and the willingness of so many to contribute to the B.V.M.A. I think it was definitely an idea ready to happen, and certainly needed for a lot of us. Let's make sure that we all use the B.V.M.A. to its full potential, both to further our own experience and also to help others whenever possible. With the framework of the association more or less up and running, it is now up to all of us to keep it alive, and I would ask everybody to think in which way, however big or small, you can contribute to keep it an exciting and challenging association.

Here we are with the first newsletter, which potentially could become the centre for many discussions between makers for years to come, a focal point to encourage exchanges between all members, professional, amateur and those with

related skills. We hope that the newsletter will particularly benefit those members working on their own outside London.

Throughout the year we will endeavour to organise two or three meetings, with various speakers and shows, providing an opportunity for all concerned to meet, exchange ideas and view each others instruments and bows. Already we have begun to develop contacts with foreign violin makers associations, which hopefully will result in useful and fruitful exchanges. Do not forget the social aspect of it all, maybe we could have a joint meeting with CAMRA!!! Personally, I am looking forward to many years of discussions with all other members of the B.V.M.A.

Before finishing I am sure you will all join me in giving John Topham a big "thank you" for all the hard work he has put in for the B.V.M.A. I look forward to meeting you all over the next few meetings.

Marc Soubeyran,  
Chairman B.V.M.A.

### London Exhibition of Early Musical Instruments

At the Royal College of Music. Instrument makers, dealers, music publishers, material and tool suppliers with recitals throughout the day. Open 12 noon to 7.30pm (Fri. 8th Sept.), 10am-7.30pm (Sat. 9th Sept) 10am -

5.30pm (Sun 10th Sept). Evening concerts each day and the R.C.M. instrument collection will be open on Fri. and Sat. Further information from the Early Music Shop on Tel. 01274 393753

## Old for New!

Critique by John Topham on making new instruments look old.

Through the centuries makers have been making new instruments to satisfy particular demands from musicians and other interested people. Most makers produced cleanly finished instruments, which looked new when they were sold. For example, French makers in the 19th century such as Collin-Mezin, Gand and Bernardel always produced fully varnished instruments and refrained from giving them an old-looking appearance. Other makers such as Derazey, Bailly, Chanot and Lupot endeavoured to create the older look by removing areas of varnish to simulate wear. Still others such as Vuillaume went out of their way to copy exact features of older instruments, although he mainly produced new instruments with just a wear pattern. In spite of the fact that most instruments were made to look new, clearly there was a commercial motive to simulate to a greater or lesser extent the semblance of age. This motive is present today and makers are under a strong pressure to follow the tradition. Why has this motive arisen? Before addressing that question one should ask why do people desire to own or to play old musical instruments as opposed to new ones in the first place.

One possible explanation for this could be that there has always been a

perception that older instruments have a higher quality with respect to their craftsmanship. Makers in the past manufactured a product which today displays an individuality that is much sought after and is perhaps lacking in many modern examples.

There is also a strong belief by those who play instruments that older ones sound better than new ones, although some makers would dispute this. Players remark on the maturity of the sound and the ease of an old instrument's response, both of which may be generally lacking in new instruments. Such assertions might have some validity on pure technical grounds due to the altered nature of old wood. (A simple experiment of shining light through strips of old and new wood with similar thicknesses would show this.) However, no definitive proof has ever been put forward and it remains a matter of subjective assessment.

Finally, there is the element of status in owning an instrument that has a 'history'. The acquisition of a violin that displays a 'character' originating from incidents in its past would be irresistible. Such an instrument of character may confer on the owner a stature of eminence, possibly beyond his or her actual talents, that would impress his or her peers. The playing of old musical instruments in the classical field is

quite prestigious. People in Britain, and particularly in England, have always markedly chosen older instruments in favour of new ones. Since the class system is more prevalent in this country than in others, this could account for the preference.

Could it be then that makers make old-looking violins to try to recreate the effects associated with older instruments; effects that musicians and their peers find desirable. Why do people want these attributes and where have these yearnings come from? I suspect that no-one knows when the idea of making something new look old to enhance its appearance caught on. It could have arisen when a prosperous middle class established itself through the industrial revolution in Europe and demanded the trappings of aristocracy and status and to be in the presence of other people displaying these trappings. Because of their rarity and consequent expensiveness, people naturally went for the next best thing, new objects that looked old. This has continued to the present day particularly with the violin family.

The resurgent popular interest in all things ancient in the late sixties brought about a greater desire to 'enhance' new instruments by making them look old. It is only in the last five to ten years, with varying economic problems besetting the entire world, that this interest in enhancing instruments has increased.

It seems to have come to the point where the market for old-looking instruments is overriding the market for new-looking ones.

Old-looking instruments appeal to the player's sense of vanity by providing him or her with a perceived status. This makes the player feel comfortable and important. However, since the core material of an old-looking instrument will always be the same as a new one, the illusion is merely skin deep. Whatever problems players may have with new instruments, such problems would surely arise with old-looking ones.

The motive for making an old-looking instrument does not rest on providing the player with a sound comparable to an old instrument. Whatever process is applied to the wood, it can never make a new piece of wood become physically like an old piece. The main motive, therefore, to make an old-looking instrument is to possibly give it a more 'interesting' aspect. Here, the maker may have more capacity to create a style. He could introduce more elements to generate an effect of a lot going on. The fact that the maker may choose the path of making the instrument more 'interesting' by giving it an aged appearance supports the idea that he is tacitly perpetuating a kind of class system. He is actively if unknowingly reinforcing the notion that age means status.

Painting elaborate baroque images onto the front and back and gilded lettering around the ribs, in ways Andreas Amati and others practised it, are alternative methods to enhance an instrument. All new harpsichords take this line of approach often to great effect. I have never seen one even attempting to look old. Other routes taken by makers involved using double purfling around the edge, elaborate purling designs on the back and lion's heads instead of scrolls. Even Stradivari himself indulged in some enhancing of his instruments. He did elaborate work on some of his violins such as the 1687 'Ole Bull' as featured in June's edition of the Strad Magazine. Most of these enhancements could be regarded as tacky were it not for the fact that reputed makers practised them. However, they do prove the point that ageing is not the only way to give an instrument greater attraction.

Still further, there is an inherent flaw in this approach of making instruments look old. Nothing new

is being added to the sum of human experience. There is ultimately nothing lastingly creative being done, especially with exact copies. The work is artistically sterile. The copying of an instrument scratch for scratch tells you nothing about the original instrument, its conception, its design or the thought processes that went on behind it.

Rather than moving forward and searching for new horizons, a step backward is being encouraged. Plans to erect buildings around St Paul's Cathedral recently designed in the classical style and approved by Prince Charles demonstrate this retrograde attitude. We appear to be searching for safety, closeting ourselves in the familiar and the approved. There is little or no appetite for the novel and the visionary, where expression is dynamic and free. This is a direction too often found occurring in a society that seems to have lost its way. It would be nice to pull ourselves back from this state of affairs, reassess our motives and forge a new beginning.

### ***The English Viola Da Gamba Conference 1995*** ***Limoge***

Christophe Coin and the Baroque Ensemble of Limoge are holding the second conference on the Viola da Gamba on the 18, 19 and 20 of November 1995. This year's conference will involve round-table discussions and a series of concerts. Participants will include Jaquier, Kessler

and Muthesius, with Jordi Savall, Wieland Kuijken and a number of musicians from the English Viol Consort "Fretwork". Further information can be had from Ensemble Baroque de Limoges, 7 bd. de Fleurus, 87000 Limoges France or Tel. (int+33) 55321998, Fax. 55320816.

### **The Road to the Met.**

John Dilworth gives an insight into the preparation for last year's Del Gesu exhibition and the forthcoming book on the great man.

Long ago when I was narrower from the side than I was from the front, and I could recognise most of the bands on Top of The Pops, Eric Wen was editor of the Strad, and noticing the soar in circulation whenever one of Roger Hargrave's Posters appeared, he put an idea to Roger and myself, that we should work on a book along the same lines and sell millions of copies and be as rich as Jeffrey Archer but only half as smug. With Stewart Pollens of the Metropolitan Museum in New York in charge of the photography, we decided the project we would all be most interested in would be to re-examine the most romanticised and least understood classical maker, Guarneri del Gesu. We would publish full-sized photographs of the highest possible quality, of twelve of the best Guarneris we could find, alongside the fullest possible technical and aesthetic analysis, careful and complete drawings, and as complete an account of Guarneri's life as we could manage.

After about a year of writing smarmy letters to important and intimidatingly rich people, we had permissions to go ahead with twelve instruments. But Eric Wen had left the "Strad" and it began to seem that the project would have to be shelved. Eric then went to work for Peter Biddulph, however Peter, being by

nature generous, and a visionary without peer amongst violin dealers, latched on to the Guarneri project with enthusiasm, agreeing to publish it, and cover our expenses whilst assembling the material. So Roger and me set off on our worldwide Guarneri safari. As we notched up the airmiles to Italy, France and America, we began to notice that the deferential and pleading tone was less on our side, but coming rather from the owners of great instruments, who wanted to participate in this prestigious project. Before too long we had a list of 20 instruments, none of which we could reasonably exclude on any grounds, each being a gobsmackingly gorgeous fiddle with immaculate pedigree. The book was getting bigger.

Whilst we were in America, we had serious discussions with Stewart about what we could achieve with all this unexpected co-operation, and the idea of launching the book with an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum grew. We also decided that the gaps in the biographical material left by the Hills would have to be filled if our book was to add anything really worthwhile to what they had already published. Duane Rosengard had always been loosely involved, and Peter didn't need much persuading to rope him in officially. With Peter Biddulph's backing, he

was let loose in the Cremona Archives, to prove or disprove all the theories about Guarneri's tormented genius, or demented incompetence as you will. What he found will be revealed to all the world's amazement, in the book, which now requires even more pages.

After about ten years of preparatory work, we realised that the 250th. anniversary of the great man's demise was nearly upon us, and either the book or the exhibition must take place in 1994. The exhibition seemed more realistic, and that became the priority. Stewart worked like a maniac, fulfilling his full time job at the museum at the same time as dragging the museum bureaucracy backwards up a gorse covered mountainside, to get the exhibition together, in what he laughingly referred to as his spare time. In London Eric and I worked on the catalogue, which in a way was a dry run for the projected book. Even the catalogue grew as it had to be continually re-edited as more instruments were offered and gladly accepted right up to the eleventh hour. By October 1994, Peter, Eric, Stewart, Duane, Roger and myself were assembled in New York whilst a steady flow of 25 of the world's greatest violins gathered around us in the museum's basement. Whilst Stewart got to work with his plate camera, Roger and I measured, studied, deliberated and argued.

The exhibition was a great success, culminating in a truly

historical concert, the kind for which the hairs on the back of your neck evolved. To Stewart's chagrin, there were frictions between the powers which shouldn't be at the museum, and we un-academic commercial restorers and dealers. At the conference that ended the exhibition Charles Beare delivered a stinging rebuke to the patronising attitude of the Curator, pointing out that private enthusiasts and commercial dealers had in fact made all the important discoveries in the field, and museums were by comparison reluctant to contribute. It still rankles that the only truly great Guarneri which we were not able to borrow for the exhibition or include in the book is the 1742 Alard, which resides in the Musee de la Musique in Paris. They refused to co-operate because although the museum was closed for renovation and the violin not on display, they felt that lending it would compromise the impact of their grand opening in April this year (still delayed...). We were close to tears at the missed opportunity to display together the Alard and the Cannon, the two best preserved (both with original necks) and arguably most famous Guarneris, never seen in public together, and possibly never will be, after Paris maintained its obstructive stance towards the Cremona exhibition of Guarneri instruments which was staged earlier this year. It was a sad introduction to the petty politics of museum life.

We all learnt a huge amount in

that month about Guarneri, and we all made changes both subtle and profound in our ideas about him. We then all returned to our constituencies and prepared for ...publication. In a state close to the worst hangover I have ever experienced, brought on by pure mental stress (working in a basement with a Yorkshireman for a month ought to be one of those character tests that would-be astronauts go through), I tried to commit these ideas to paper in

## Propolis

Brief Notes by Dr John Basford

Supposedly identical varnish ingredients vary considerably, in fact often giving rise to batches of varnish similarly prepared behaving in quite different ways. None more so than propolis. Over the past ten years I have experimented with propolis from various sources - ranging from China through America to Europe - they were all different. I thought a few brief notes, a select biography and a couple of words of caution concerning propolis might be useful to other makers.

The word has a Greek etymology: pro (for or in defence), and polis (the city). This at once indicates its function within the bee colony - though the subtlety and scope of this protective function is greater than one might initially suspect.

Propolis is the resinous exudation of plants gathered by honeybees. The main sources in northern temperate regions are various species of poplar, elm, birch, alder, beech, horse chestnut, pine and

publishable form. I had nightmares for weeks after, of dropped and lost violins and frustrated musicians slowly garrotting me with a Dominant A string; the things that could of easily happened, but didn't. By the end of this year we hope to have assembled more information than anyone could possibly want to know about Guarneri and all his works and sometime next year it will be published, probably in two volumes of crippling weight!

spruce trees (Seeley). This collection takes place during the summer and early autumn in the warmest part of the day.

Within the hive the propolis is used to reinforce wax combs, to block up cracks, to repair small holes up to 3/16 inch in diameter (Langstroth), to reduce the entrance to protect from inclement weather or intruders, to embalm the carcasses of intruders, to paint over the interior of each cell prior to the queen laying in it and to coat the nest's cavity walls. It is also becoming more apparent (Swain, Harborne, Lindenfellser, Ghisalberti etc.) that propolis contains potent antifungal, antibacterial and antiviral components.

The composition of propolis varies but a general guide would be 70% resin (natural polymers), 25% beeswax and 5% volatile oils. Over 30 compounds, mainly flavonoids, have been isolated from the volatile oil fraction (Seeley). The once held belief that pollen was a propolis source appears now to be

dismissed (Popravko).

It is soluble, to a degree, in turpentine, alcohol, and also in dilute alkaline solutions such as ammonia solution and caustic soda solution. Care must be taken when applying heat; when cold, propolis is brittle, at 70 degrees F it is plastic but it melts at about 150 degrees F. According to Seeley 'When fresh, the tree resins are so sticky that propolis foragers require unloading by other bees, but as time passes they dry and turn brittle'. It is the case that different batches of propolis can give rise to a wide variation of drying times.

Colour variation is also considerable. A large quantity has a rather unpleasant, greenish hue. Alfonsus' observations are related by Butler. He discovered that fresh propolis ...was of four different colours: water-white, transparent droplets which on close examination appeared to be iridescent; brilliant, clear, dark red drops; clear, lemon-yellow, shiny drops; and opaque, greenish-grey drops.' He goes on to say Alfonsus' considered the white to be collected from pines, the red from poplars. He was unable to discover the source of the other two colours.

The choice of solvent also plays a considerable role, alcohol and turpentine providing golden-yellows and ammonia and caustic soda red-browns. A wide colour range can be obtained by the use of various reagents.

Popravko's paper suggests that it may not be necessary to spend one's life befriending beekeepers. He isolated and extracted many of the same chemical components as in his propolis samples

by preparing alcohol extracts of birch buds (*Betula verrucosa*).

Speaking from personal experience I would strongly suggest 'clean' propolis, by which I mean without dead bees, moths and lumps of the hive included. Clean propolis should smell aromatically sweet and if stored in a jar will keep for years, 'dirty' propolis may well smell musty and will degenerate over a few months. Avoid anything with a greenish tinge, unless of course you want a green varnish.

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## Pre-Stressed Bass Bar

Wilfred Saunders with a concrete example of lateral thinking in springing bassbars.

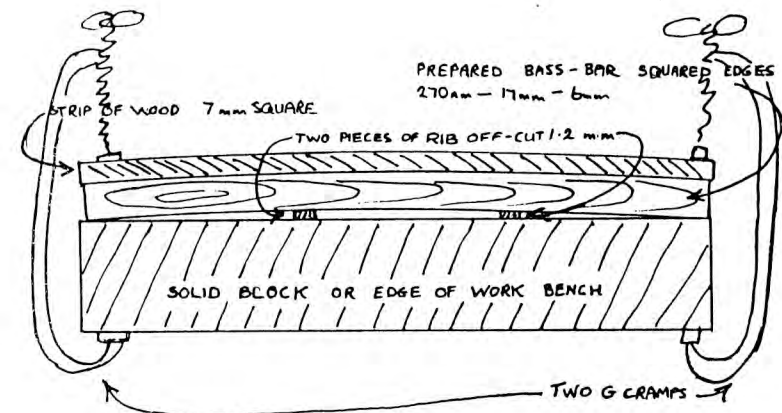
Three years ago, at the Loughbrough Violin Making Course, Dr Peter Love and I were discussing fitting bass-bars, and the correspondence in the "Strad" of some years ago was mentioned, about bass-bars becoming tired and losing some of their ability to resist the pressure of the bridge to some degree, after many years.

I don't subscribe to his theory, but like many ideas, there may be a grain of truth in it, but not to the extent of needing to renew the bass-bar every twenty years or so, as I seem to remember was being suggested.

Some recent developments in pre-stressed reinforced concrete were discussed and the technique of

stretching the steel reinforcing rods with hydraulic rams, and then pouring the liquid concrete around the stretched rods, so that when the beam was in a load-bearing position in the building, there was an inbuilt upward pressure to counter the imposed weight on the beam. So why not do the same with a bass-bar!

The diagram below illustrates a simple method of achieving this. The 7mm. strip of wood is first glued to the bass-bar in the bent position as shown. The bar is then fitted and glued the violin belly as normal. The strip of wood is planed off and the bass-bar is given its final shape. The finished bar then has an inbuilt resistance to the bridge pressure.

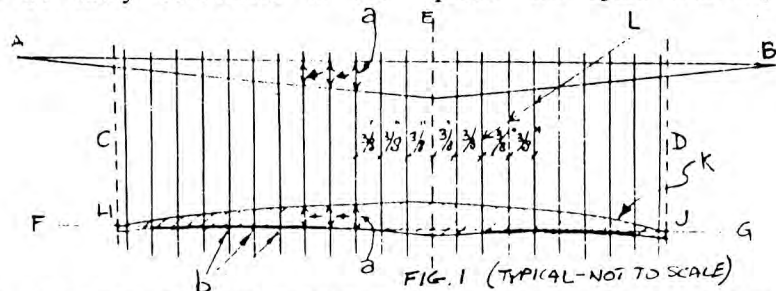


## Bassbar Curvatures:

A Method from A.C.P.G. Faanhof

So far I have not read one book or article wherein it was clearly explained how the concave curves left and right of the highest point of the bar (location of bridge!) should be shaped as they usually are. Mostly the author states that the bar should be nicely curved towards both ends and that is all.

However, these curves need or rather should not be made at random but can be easily constructed in the



following manner. If the bar would have to reinforce a flat plane loaded at one spot (the bridge!) it would be made as shown in the upper drawing of fig.1. This shape is mechanically correct and represents a so-called beam of equal resistance, meaning that its moment of resistance is correctly related to the bending moment at any location.

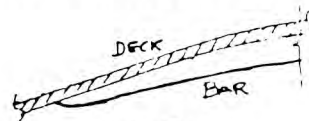
Though a violin bar supports a curved plane it should still be a beam of equal resistance. Knowing this the proper curves can be easily constructed as shown in fig 1. Take a piece of thin plywood about 14" x 2" and draw a straight line A-B. The points A and B are the ends of the bass-bar line (belly centre line side) if this line is lengthened until it meets the points where the belly

joins the sides or rather the linings.

Draw another straight line F-G parallel to line A-B. Mark the location of the bridge (line E) and the ends of the bass-bar (lines C and D).

Take the fitted bar, lay it with highest side on the line F-G and with the ends on the points H and J, draw the line K. Now draw vertical lines L on the left and right side of line E, spaced 3/8" apart. With a pair of

compasses transfer the distances "a" from the upper drawing to the lower one. Draw a curved line through the points "b". This line is the mechanically correct shape of your bass-bar. Saw out and file and sand the hatched part and you may use this as the bass-bar pattern. How to cut the ends is a matter of taste though technically speaking I



rather prefer the soft rounded ends above the abrupt, slanted ones (fig.2).

(Extract from the "Strad" March 1974, with kind permission)

## The Dartington Violin Conference

Formerly the Tiverton Violin conference and now in its eighth successful year, Colin wills has the history.

On the third weekend in September the event that became known as the Tiverton Violin Conference will be resurrected at Dartington hall in Devon. It is to be hoped that this will begin a long association with Dartington Hall and that the coincidental founding of the British Violin Making Association will herald a long period of co-operation and interaction amongst luthiers.

For those who did not attend one of the previous weekend conferences, the event seeks to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information amongst all those interested in bowed and stringed instruments. It takes the form of a series of discourses - ranging from erudite lecture to passionate outburst - interspersed with periods of more general discussion. However perhaps more important is the opportunity for individual encounters outside conference time. To judge from the enthusiasm generated late into the night and early the following morning, the formula works.

It all began in 1986 when, wishing to broaden my knowledge of violin varnish, I conceived the notion of enticing a number of experts in the field to yield the benefit of their wisdom and experience. Remembering the natural reserve and traditional secrecy of most violinmakers - particularly regarding the secrets of varnish - I had doubts about the likely success of the enterprise, but all who attended that first conference will remember the excitement generated, beginning with the eloquent

historical introduction by John Dilworth and culminating in the demonstration of the application of a colour glaze by Bill Fulton.

Acoustics was the subject of the following year's conference and computers replaced bottles and brushes. Because of the rather more academic nature of the subject, attendance was lower but considerable heat as well as sound was generated as the weekend developed into a good natured confrontation between the "Catgutters" and more instinctive violin makers.

By popular request the following year's conference returned to more practical matters with gouges and planes supplanting computing terminals and a panel consisting largely of practising makers and restorers, but also included a first hand account by Claire Barlow of the analysis of classical violin varnish by electron microscope and EDAX at Cambridge University.

In subsequent years various developments took place. Live music was introduced in the form of a string quartet who not only provided a concert on the Saturday night but were also able to sample and comment upon various instruments on display, and this encouraged makers to bring more instruments to exhibit. The event also ceased to have a particular topic. Instead the speakers were chosen for their skill and expertise and invited to speak about their own specialisation. As a result the range of speakers became more international and the subjects

more wide ranging. Among the more far-flung contributions were those by Karl Roy, Roberto Regazzi, Bill Monical, Francis Kuttner and Roger Hargrave, and in the very early days of glasnost, Premysl Spidlen and Denis Yaravoi were persuaded to come from Czechoslovakia and Russia respectively. Bowmakers have featured several years with contributions by Bernard Millant, Bill Watson and John Stagg.

Unfortunately, the Tiverton venue, East Devon College, was privatised in 1993 like most Colleges of Further Education, and its new financial masters failed to realise the significance and

## **Obituary: Ronald Roberts**

Ronald Roberts of Exeter died on the 4th March of this year. He will be remembered with affection by the many violin makers here and abroad who knew Ron and benefitted from his researches into the art of fine instrument making. Always generous with his advice and help, he encouraged anyone who came to him to try making for themselves. The formation of the B.V.M.A. would have met with his approval as he was always ready to share his knowledge, and seek help from other makers if he needed it.

Ron gave me the wood, instruction and advice to make my first instruments

## **Letters**

*Dear Members,*

*Now that we in Britain have our own violin making association, with it's highly laudable aims and ambitions, it is tempting, particularly to those of us outside London who are used to having*

value of what was taking place there one important weekend each year. Support for the event was withdrawn and the seventh conference was cancelled.

Dartington Hall not only has established credentials and excellent facilities in a congenial setting, but can offer residential facilities. I am glad that after a long search and a good deal of negotiation they have now been persuaded to take on the administration of the conference.

Now it is up to you !

just as he was aided by Arthur Richardson when he started. When he returned to Richardson with his first viola completed, Arthur said, "If I'd known you were going to make such a good job I'd have given you better stuff." Ron would chuckle in his deep Lancastrian voice as he told this story. His fine craftsmanship and keen insight will live on, not only in his work, which is mostly kept within his family, but also in the continuation of his skills which he freely gave to those of us who were inspired by his enthusiasm.

Les Gare, July 1995

*to struggle to maintain contact, to sit back now and leave it all up to those selfless individuals who have already expended so much energy on our behalf. I do hope that we can manage to resist this temptation, as I greatly fear that in*

*order to actually promote those aims which we so effortlessly endorsed, many of us would require a change of attitude and behaviour on the scale of Mr. Hyde's transformation into Dr. Jekyll, and I am not sure that we all quite realise the gap that exists between the ambition and the reality.*

*For example, all B.V.M.A. members have recently endorsed the aims "to encourage the dissemination of information", "To promote general fellowship of all those interested in and concerned with the violin family....." and they will have realised that "As a member you will have the benefit of associating with a group with whom you can share and exchange information". Without disagreeing with any of this and not wishing to prejudge any of the membership, I would suggest that as a profession we could most easily be characterised by our failure to communicate with each other and not only by our tardiness in instigating contact but also by our inability to respond to the communications of others. It is not my intention to embarrass anyone as I think we should all share the guilt or embarrassment, but I do think that an honest acceptance of the realities of the situation should be the first step in realising our aims. We may not be able to improve efficiency by collective action, but by at least 60%. I am sure that we all endorse the aims of our B.V.M.A. as long as others are prepared to promote them, but to make our society a real success, they will need to become our personal aims too.*

*Padraig O Dubhlaoidh.  
Hibernian Violins, Malvern, Worcs.*

*Dear Members,  
Having joined the association, earlier*

*this year as some sort of British trained overseas member, I particularly welcome the forum offered by a regular newsletter as I shall rarely be able to attend meetings. Nevertheless, I would like to make one small suggestion: I appreciated the short write-up on every management committee member in the associations' "welcome letter" as I hadn't yet heard of everyone involved. Considering the much welcomed open structure of the association, I would find a commented eventual membership list of great value. Also hoping that this will encourage individual contacts between members and steer against the development of a large, fairly anonymous, national society right from the outset. I would like to suggest that every member is invited to write a few lines about their professional life on a voluntary basis to be printed alongside their name in a coming membership list. I think that such an entry should be voluntary as a good many gifted violin-makers don't translate very well into career records. On the other hand purposefully wrong or misleading entries could be deemed incompatible with membership. Simply on the basis that one of the association's aims is to encourage the dissemination of information i.e. not disinformation, quite apart from the breach of trust. I've written my own entry much along the lines of the above mentioned short introductions, which could give a guideline.*

*All the best to everyone involved,  
Jorn Langrehr  
Roseggerstrasse 36, 12059 Berlin-Neukolln, Germany.  
(Jorn initially studied at the Early Strings Departement of the former London College of Furniture. After some years of working for "Anton Pilar-Geigenbau" in*