

THE BACK PAGE

PVA glued? Don't touch it!

Dear members

About the question from Ian Allan (BVMA Newsletter issue 2);

Question: What are the recommendations for removal of fronts, necks etc. from an instrument glued with PVA glues.

Answer: Similar to the traditional advice to those about to get married. Don't!

If you think this is unduly negative, perhaps you should consider whether time would be better spent; Getting government (or at least BVMA) warnings attached to all such instruments- "Buyers are warned that, in the event of damage necessitating the removal of parts for repair, repair is likely to be uneconomic."

Educating/persuading insurance assessors for Household Contents Policies (because this is the common arrangement for insurance of such instruments) to accept repairer's recommendations to "write off" damaged instruments, rather than ordering uneconomic repairs.

Selling similar, new, instruments as replacements for damaged ones.

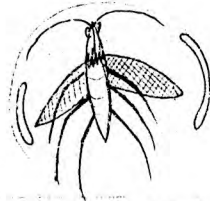
Making new instruments glued with traditional natural glues.

It seems, to me that if repairers stopped trying to repair PVA glued instruments they would be doing everybody a favour. manufacturers, dealers, players and the repairers themselves.

Michael Heffer, Cambridge.



DON'T WASTE OLD GLUE!— COLLECT WOOD-BORING CREATURES & ADD TO MELTED ANIMAL GLUE. WHEN THE GLUE SETS YOU WILL HAVE AN ATTRACTIVE JELLY-LIKE PLAQUE TO THROW AT / GIVE TO YOUR OTHER VIOLIN MAKING FRIEND.
(ADD FRASS FOR STABILITY)



(The Bass Bar is closed 'til further notice)

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.

Newsletter

of the British Violin Making Association

Editor: Shem Mackey

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ISSUE 3

BVMA

MARCH 96

Editorial

One year old

The first year as an association is behind us and nowhere was this more evident than at the recent committee meeting. There was an urgency and purpose to the proceedings and the contents of the agenda were despatched with little bother. With the teething problems of constitution etc. behind us, we can now look forward to the two major projects ahead, namely the Dartington Conference 1996 and the exhibition of British makers in either 1997 or 1998. These projects alone embrace two of the basic tenets of our association, the dissemination of information and promotion of British violin making and as such require the full support and help of the membership.

More quality articles

As I have said in the past, the content of the newsletter is almost entirely dependant on the membership. We need quality articles to develop and maintain a high standard in this newsletter. I would again ask all members to consider what they can add with articles, letters, criticisms, profiles of makers (living or dead), technical or scientific data. Everyone has something to say, so why

York Early Music Festival and Exhibition 1996

This year's York Early Music Festival will be held from 5th. to 14th. July. The theme of this year's festival is the music of the last decade of each century.

The accompanying trade Exhibition of Instruments will be held over the final weekend, the 13th. and 14th of July, in the

not say it through these pages! The deadline for next issue is 15th May.

Dartington Conference 1996

You will have received the details of the Dartington Conference with this newsletter. B.V.M.A. members are eligible to a reduced rate and also, there will be a three week period to mid April during which members will be given booking priority, so book early!

Local gatherings

Over the past five years or so, the violin makers in and around London have had an annual get-together usually just before Christmas. These evenings are of a purely social nature with each person bringing an example of his/her work which others can then view, handle and discuss in an informal atmosphere. Each one has been very successful and has led to a greater openness and camaraderie among the makers (in fact it was out of these meetings that the B.V.M.A. was born). It has been suggested that makers in other parts of Britain might do the same. If so, then use the association to make contact with those people, who may be interested in your area.

Next issue

An extremely comprehensive article by Prof. Peter Klein on dendrochronology, and its application to the accurate dating of musical instruments, including some del Gesu's.

pleasant surroundings of the Guildhall. Makers interested in exhibiting, or anyone requiring further information, should contact; The Early Music Shop, 38 Manningham lane, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD1 3EA. Tel. (01274) 393753, Fax. (01274) 393516.

Lott's tools

The Horniman Museum, in south London is home to the remaining tools and moulds of violin maker John Lott, Andrew Lamb tells the story of how they got there

John Lott was born in 1805 and has long since been acknowledged as one of the finest of 19th century English violin makers. He learnt his trade from his father, John Frederick, who had been a permanent member of Thomas Dodd's workshop since 1798. John junior was something of a wild spirit and is reported to have resigned his apprenticeship in order to take an appointment as elephant keeper with a travelling circus.

Having toured abroad, he returned to violin making and established himself in Wardour Street. At that time, Soho was a dynamic centre of instrument making and was well supported by attendant service industries including tool suppliers.

Stylistically, Lott is most remembered for the "authenticity" of his Guarnerius models (Complete with wear and usage). This distressed finish, together with his habit of leaving instruments unlabelled, have led to his instruments being mistaken for genuine Cremonese. This mode of construction was part of a larger movement within the violin making world during the mid 19th century. Vuillaume and Fendt, who were both contemporaries of Lott,

tended to be scrupulous in reproducing observed features from existing instruments. Lott tended to go for a visual pastiche of the Cremonese style. This was seen in some circles as a kind of fraud although it was recognised that Lott was nothing, if not a skilled craftsman.

Lott died in 1871. It is not known for sure what happened to his goods at this time but there is a theory that his tools and equipment passed over to the Chanot family. George Chanot and his son Joseph were also working out of Wardour Street at this time and would have been neighbours of Lott.

Whatever the truth, the tools and equipment of Lott, together with a demonstration model violin by Chanot were both accessioned into the collection of musical instruments at the Horniman Museum.

The Lott tools are a comprehensive set of gouges, chisels, purfling cutters, moulds (internal and external), reamers and templates. They were donated to the Horniman Museum in 1962 and have been on permanent exhibition ever since. The original display was in the North Hall of the Horniman Museum and the tools were part of a cohesive collection of string instruments from around the world.

In 1993 a new exhibition of musical instruments was opened. This was a chance for a new concept in musical instrument display to be fulfilled. With the availability of a whole gallery of space over 1000 instruments from the Horniman collections have been put on show. The instruments are arranged in

a variety of orders which means that a strictly hierarchical display can be offset by others of a geographic or technological theme.

Preparation for the new display allowed Lott's tools to be removed for conservation. This was an opportunity for the material stability of each item to be checked and any remedial work to be undertaken. It is the practice of conservation to avoid unnecessary interventive treatment. For Lott's tools this principle caused no difficulties. They were in excellent condition and required only the lightest surface cleaning. For organic parts this meant removal of dust and dirt using a non-polar solvent which would not deteriorate any delicate fibres. The metal parts were cleaned with propanone which is a much more

volatile solvent and required the use of extraction to remove the fumes.

Once the tools had been satisfactorily cleaned some attention was given to their display conditions. An air conditioning system was installed to control the environment for all of the instruments. The temperature is maintained at a steady 19 degrees centigrade while relative humidity, which accounts for much stress to historical artefacts, is kept at 48%. These levels were arrived at after several projects monitoring the existing conditions within the collections and comparing them with a set of "ideal" conditions. It was felt that this compromise would be more friendly to the objects than somehow forcing them to accept a nominal ideal which might be too stressful for their material structure.

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Helen Michetschläger & Jonathan Sherlock

The tools are displayed in that part of the exhibition concerned with string instruments. This seems logical enough although they could equally have been placed with the geographical items. They are kept in a drawer case and are mounted on a specially constructed backing which has been lined with washed calico. The mounting materials have all been selected, following tests, for their low levels of volatile emissions. This means they will not

interact at a molecular level with the objects. This is unlike many more traditional materials which have been found to cause deterioration to some objects.

The Music Room at the Horniman Museum is one of the worlds foremost musical instrument displays. The museum is open to the public from 10.30 until 5.30 every day except Christmas.

Pernambuco

Paul Collins looks at the past and present situation regarding this diminishing species

The name Brazil was used in the middle ages for plants producing a red dye - notably the East India Wood *C.sappan*. When the Portuguese first arrived in Brazil in 1500, they discovered a tree which contained a similar dye. The tree was so plentiful that they named the country after it.

Brazil wood was once found from Piaui in the North to Rio de Janeiro in the South, prevailing in the littoral from Pernambuco to Rio de Janeiro. The botanist Lamark gave this tree its scientific name, *Caesalpinia Echinata*. The first word refers to Andreas Ceasalpinia (1519-1603), the Italian botanist and doctor, the second word relates to the thorns along its trunk. Brazilwood, Pernambuco and Pinkwood are all names used in Europe to refer to the same species. The word "Pernambuco" is generally used in the violin world to

describe the class of wood best suited to the manufacture of bows. This is a generic term used to describe a whole number of different species of Brazilwood.

Called Pau Brasil by the Brazilians and Portuguese or Ibriptanga (blood wood) by the original Indians, Pernambuco was the first product to be shipped by the Portuguese from the colony they discovered in 1550. At first the wood was exported for the purpose of obtaining an extract for dyeing textile fabrics and silk. It is thought that early bow makers bought their best bow sticks from wood merchants responsible for supplying dye mills. Older bow makers recall the wood being offered to them in a variety of different grades such as English Pernambuco and Victoria Wood. English Pernambuco can be traced back to British wood yards, Victoria Wood seems to relate to the seaport Vitoria from where it

came, Vitoria is still a major port.

For three hundred years the tree was sold throughout the world by the Portuguese, who controlled a monopoly. The tree could once be found all over the country especially on the coast but three centuries of incursions brought the forest to a point of exhaustion. If this wasn't enough, at the beginning of the 18th Century wood merchants began to invade inland. In 1810 Portugal became concerned with the depletion of one of its most important sources of wealth and issued a series of acts restricting the exploitation of the timber.

The beginning of the end came in 1826 with the discovery in Germany of aniline dyes, the wood was no longer needed in the dyeing industry, from the wholesale cutting down and exporting of the tree there became a state of disinterest and neglect.

To the north of Vitoria, in Gurana, Horst John, a specialist wood dealer, has set up a workshop specialising in the cutting of timber for bow making, alongside a bow making workshop. He started many years ago by literally hacking a path through the jungle buying all the Pernambuco that he could lay his hands on. He has now, reportedly, taken to cultivating the trees themselves.

It was sometime ago that he founded a privately run wood research institute and embarked on expeditions which penetrated parts of the Amazon which were barely accessible. He also explored what used to be the dense forest of the Mata, one of the primeval forest belts still remaining, stretching from Rio de Janeiro in the south to the federal state of Rio Grande de Norte in the North, it was named Costa Pau Brazil by local researchers as it was said

to be the only forest containing an indigenous stock of trees producing the much coveted Pernambuco wood.

Pernambuco is a difficult wood to grow and has to cope with many natural enemies such as ants, snakes, and even hares. Horst John says that of 30,000 saplings he has planted only two thirds have survived. He is aiming to cultivate 100,000 saplings by the year 2000.

The tree is large, growing up to 30 metres tall and about 80cm in diameter. It has fragrant oval shaped yellow leaves, the trunk is thorny and has yellow and red flowers, which form conical bunches. One of the main problems with Pernambuco is its very slow growth. At 22 years the trees are just adolescent, about the size of yard trees, just entering the stage where they begin to flower. At 50 years the trunk is perhaps as thick as a man's thigh. Once the sapwood and juvenile wood at the core have been removed it will hardly yield useful bow wood. A mature tree for harvesting is some 200 years old, this gives a reasonable proportion of quarter sawn, good quality heartwood from a trunk that is 30-45 cm in diameter. All this means is that it will take four or five generations to replenish our stocks of pernambuco.

The log must be carefully cut to ensure the best use of this precious wood. First it is individually cross cut and lined up for each billet cut to ensure that the grain is straight within the plank. The log is first quartered, planks are then alternatively taken from the two faces, two or perhaps three from each depending on the log size. When the grain will no longer serve, the remaining wedge is turned onto its bark side and radially sawn to give some more quarter cut planks from the middle of the

wedge. Drying and seasoning is done slowly to prevent checking and for the pores to close, it is said that the drying takes about 30 years.

Today, nobody really knows how much pernambuco there is left, what is known, however, is that it is in very short supply. Fauna and Flora International admit that they don't know exactly how much is left but are trying to find out. Today few people know what the Brazilwood tree looks like, it grows very slowly and takes a long time to reach its formidable height. To grow and to flourish, the Brazilwood tree needs time, a sad irony for a species that is on the verge of extinction.

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Report of a meeting with FFI at the Royal Geographic Society

Robin Hamilton

Following the talk given by Anna Jenkins to the BVMA, botanist from Fauna & Flora International (FFI) a meeting took place to discuss the future involvement of the BVMA in the Soundwood project. Those present were Mike Read and Anna Jenkins (FFI), Marc Soubeyran (Chairman BVMA), Michael Byrd (J & A Beare), Stephen Barber (Lutemaker), and Robin Hamilton (JP Guivier). The meeting lasted the best part of a morning and the discussions covered a wide range of issues concerning the use of endangered

timber in instrument making.

It was agreed that the primary task is to raise people's awareness of these issues and of the Soundwood project, working together with players, suppliers of fittings and large manufacturers of instruments and bows. We were able to suggest some companies thought to be the most important to approach for initial support and feedback. The FFI reiterated the fact that they do not want makers to stop using rosewood, ebony, African

blackwood or pernambuco. However, in the short term, they are of the opinion that it is necessary to find some substitute woods and materials as, although some timber from sustainable sources may be available in the near future, it will probably take fifty years before enough is available to satisfy demands. The choice of substitute timbers is problematical because removing pressure from one timber only to transfer it to another simply shifts the problem sideways. If suitable substitute timbers were used, it was felt that Violin and Cello making competitions will provide an ideal ground to display them.

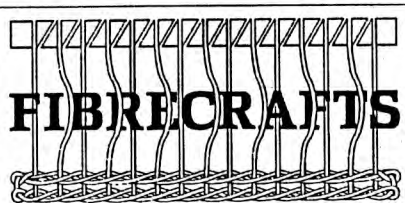
With regard to the use of materials, it was generally agreed that the Violin world is very conservative. However, things can change. Tortoiseshell and ivory are now unacceptable for new bow frogs, and the use of ivory for bow faces is now being substituted by bone or mammoth tusk. So perhaps it is possible to introduce substitute woods that would be acceptable.

Much was said of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and some products, once they have received FSC accreditation, will soon be available. As consumers begin to gain a greater awareness of the FSC in the near future, it is both important and advantageous for craftsmen and businesses to start working towards producing goods of FSC standard.

A great deal of research still needs

to be done as far as the many varieties or sub-species of each timber is concerned, about which the craftsmen present admitted a lack of knowledge.

Although FFI has invested a large amount of work in the Soundwood project, it is at present forced to be selective due to limited funds. For this very important work to be carried out, fund raising is urgently required. Money donated to FFI can be specified directly to their 100% fund and then allocated to the Soundwood project, without any deductions for administration. It must be in every BVMA member's interest to support FFI to ensure continuing supply of these timbers for future generations of our industry.



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Vegetable Lakes

Low temperature laking by David Rubio

I shall digress from violin making for a moment to tell you a bit about my wife's work. She re-creates Ancient oriental carpets specialising in 7th. to 17th. century re-creations from museum fragments. She is world renowned for her work which has involved a great deal of research with natural dyes.

A few years ago she published her re-discovery of the ancient tribes dying methods using no heat source and achieved madder reds from the palest pink shades to the deepest garnet, of a depth and shade that the dye experts state has not been seen on carpets since the 17th. century.

To achieve these results in room temperature water involved the trick of pre-mordanting the wool for up to 30 days in alum. The deepest garnet was then achievable after 8 to 10 days in the cool dye bath.

The important question then arose.....Is it lightfast? The original carpets have still retained a tremendous depth of colour, including the oldest surviving carpet known as the Pazyryk which is dated at 400 years BC. You cannot imagine how deep the madder reds still are....that's pretty damned lightfast in my book.

So an interesting question is...What have natural dyers been doing wrong since then? Answer....Heating up their dye baths.

We tested my wife's samples (her name is Nest by the way) by covering up half of the sample card and placing the whole thing in my UV room for three months. The exposed half was noticeably darker. We followed this up by placing the samples in a south facing window for a further six months. There is no doubt that the dyed wool has oxidised and become darker, much to the amazement of the dye experts.

The basis of my own lake making work, is to work out techniques of extracting the colour in alum, just as my wife does, without altering the chemical constituency of the mixture by heating it. This involves long periods of standing.

A medieval manuscript, recently translated at the Hamilton-Kerr Institute, gives directions on standing times so I am convinced that I am on to something here. Hopefully completely lightfast lakes can come from all sorts of vegetable matter.

I am now able to produce pigments that make me ashamed to show any of my previous work. I simply cannot find words which adequately express how glorious and amazingly transparent these pigments are.

MADDER LAKE

adapted from a thirteenth century recipe a method of producing vegetable lakes at low temperatures.

Those who are accustomed to making lakes will find a lot of this very familiar. The amount of detail which follows is for the benefit of those who might wish to do this for the first time. If you follow these procedures exactly, you simply cannot fail.

Equipment and materials required;

- i) Warming plate capable of maintaining a heat source at 40-45 degrees C.
- ii) Suitable vessel as dye pot (not metal). i.e. Heat resistant glass (preserve jar like a Kilner or Mason jar) 3 Litre capacity.
- iii) Plastic Bucket (not metal) of around 5 gallon capacity
- iv) Thermometer.
- v) Filter Funnel (largest available).
- vi) Several large chemical filter papers.
(Use strong but fast flowing variety available from lab supplier. Coffee filters are a bit weak and can break when you touch them or move them in wet condition.)
- vii) Several more good glass vessels. (One of 2 litre capacity to gold the Alum solution and a couple more to collect under the filter funnel.)

MADDER LAKE

This procedure is the same for any vegetable dye including Buckthorn or Weld. Weigh 120 gms. of chopped Madder root and place into a fine cotton bag. Tie the bag up tightly to prevent the material from escaping into the bath. Don't be tempted to use powdered dye as it will seep through the bag and cloud up the liquor. Also be sure to leave a great deal of space in the bag for the dyestuff to swell to at least twice its size. Alternatively, to obtain a bit more colour from the madder, this procedure can be dispensed with and the root mixed loosely with the potash solution. However the mixture will require to be strained to remove the root and then filtered through fine cotton prior to stage six. Weigh 60gms. of Potash and dissolve in the 3 litre Mason jar containing 2400 mls. water which has not been through a water softening system.

Add the madder bag to the pot and gently prod the bag a few times to saturate it. Place the pot on a warming plate and allow to reach 40-45 degrees C. If the pot reaches 50 degrees for a very short period, no harm will result. Above that temperature the carbohydrate part of the Alizarin chain will break away, resulting in a less transparent pigment with too much tendency towards brown. Prepare a vessel containing 60 gms. ALUM and dissolve in 1200 mls. water. After the 36 hours of warming, pour off the liquor into the large plastic bucket.

Very gently squeeze the dye bag into the now empty MASON jar, making sure that no sediment escapes from the bag, if it does then do not add it to the liquor in the bucket. Allow the liquor to cool. Slowly add the Alum solution to the liquor, stirring continually and observe the frothing and coagulating of the mixture. Leave this rather muddy looking stuff to stand for 3 days, stirring at least a few times daily. Fill the plastic bucket containing the mixture with fresh cold water, allow the sediment to settle completely to the bottom of the bucket. This usually takes about 12 hours the first time you wash it.

Carefully pour off as much water as you can making sure that the sediment remains in the bucket undisturbed. Refill the bucket with fresh water. This time the sediment will settle a lit more quickly, in about an hour or so. Repeat this process for as many times as it takes for the water to become completely clear. Slightly tinted won't do, expect at least five washes to clean completely. (Buckthorn is the very devil to wash clean. I washed mine for about ten days and there was still a yellow tint to the water. Finally I gave up and filtered if like that, the lake doesn't seem to have suffered any. There was no such problem with the madder.)

Siphon off as much of the water as possible and filter the remainder. What remains on the filter paper is the precious lake. If the paper gets too clogged up and stops dripping through,

carefully set up a second paper and continue the process. (This is when it is easy to damage the filter paper).

Once the filtering is complete, place the filter paper opened out on some kind of grill which will allow it to air dry completely. Carefully rub all the bits of dried lake off the paper over a suitably large gathering dish. Grind the lake crystals in a mortar and pestle into a fine powder (a face mask is advised for this operation as the grinding produces a fine smoke like dust that can irritate nasal passages), using a good heavy Muller and a sheet of frosted (sandblasted) glass. You should be able to obtain this from any glazier. Mullers are available from Kremer in Germany and A.P. Fitzpatrick, London. Add a little drying linseed oil to some of the lake powder and mull, adding just enough oil to make the pigment the right consistency. It will appear, once gathered together, as an almost black/red ointment.

I use my pigments by glazing over coats of clear varnish and this works magnificently. I have no experience of mixing into varnish and will welcome any feedback about this after others have tried it. Meanwhile don't hesitate to ask if something has been left unclear in this description.

CARLO CHIESA - *On the Benefits and Dangers of history to your life*

The subject of historical knowledge is quite a huge one and has many different implications. In my University, as a student of philosophy, I was compelled to study some history as well. At the beginning, I was very bored by this obligation, but later I changed my mind and finally specialised in history. I must say that I hate dates and can never remember them, but history is not just a list of events which happened in a more or less distant past, it is something different. If you are interested in the subject, I strongly recommend the small book written more than a Century ago by a German boy, whose title I borrowed for this article.¹

After giving my talk in Dartington (on the history of Milanese Violin Makers), an important violin maker suggested to me that the talk was addressed primarily to dealers. My answer was that it was addressed to an expert audience. I was a bit surprised by this criticism; my talk was quite specialised, and I consciously chose to report an historical survey of the Milanese makers without stylistic references to their work. I acknowledge that my talk may have been heavy going, and not particularly easy to listen to, but I believe that historical knowledge is very important to anyone interested in the violin, and particularly so for makers of new instruments. Let me try to explain what I mean.

In the world of Violin making and trading there are many different figures. The Dealer is the man who buys and sells instruments. He needs to know the owner who wants to sell the instrument and the buyer who will spend money to acquire it. As a dealer, he does not necessarily know what the instrument is. This is the job of the second character in my list, the appraiser. He or she is the one who can identify the origin of the instrument, and for this needs proper historical and critical experience. Then we find the technicians: the repairer, or restorer, the artisans whose skill is required when an old instrument is in a bad condition. The repairers and restorers are usually members also of the last part of this short and willingly incomplete list, the violin makers. The makers of new instruments must be skilled wood workers and technicians, but if their work is to be worthy of note, they also need some artistic gift. It is very difficult to find someone who is just a dealer or just an appraiser or just a repairer/restorer or just a maker. In Italy, and I hope in Britain as well, a liutaio is a little bit of all those things. It has always been so; everyone must know the multifarious activities of JB Vuillaume, to name just one, and I believe that the great Italian makers of the past were not so very different.

All these figures qualify in some way as "experts". They share a common

characteristic in that all can judge an instrument, but from different points of view. A dealer will be interested in the value, an appraiser in the origin, a restorer in the condition, a maker in the working of the instrument itself. If you are involved in any way with lutherie, you need to be some kind of expert. You need to be able to judge an instrument even if you are not an appraiser or dealer, or have never been interested in identifying old violins. If you are a violin maker and cannot handle a good Stradivari without whispering to yourself: "Wow, this is wonderful", or look at a poor Chinese factory instrument without despair - well I am afraid your violins will never be very beautiful.

The importance of historical knowledge for an appraiser is obvious, but I think a maker of new instruments also needs to know something about the history of past luthiers. When we make a violin, we are not inventing something new. In fact, we are copying the work of past masters. You may prefer different words to explain this notion, but it is absolutely true. Yet it does not imply an impoverishment for us, but an immense richness. To quote a wonderful image from a medieval master, Bernard of Chartres, "we are dwarves sitting on the shoulders of giants". This was true for theologians then, and is particularly relevant to us as violin makers now. We should be aware of this.

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Looking at old instruments is the best way to improve our own work. You can compare your work with that of Stradivari, and you must do that to start with, if you really want to do better. But you must look deeply, with an expert eye, and here is the importance of the knowledge of history: it can give you a more critical approach. Historical knowledge gives you a better understanding of the development of the violin during last 500 years. For example, it is easier to learn at school or from a book that Pietro Guarneri of Mantua was the son of Andrea Guarneri of Cremona, and that Andrea was a pupil of Nicolò Amati, the son of Gerolamo and grandson of Andrea, instead of trying to work out from studying their instruments who taught the other. This information can guide you in looking at their instruments. You can learn much from all of them, but without an historical frame you will not understand their connection and will lose the chance of following the evolution of an idea that violin makers from Andrea Amati to Pietro Guarneri and beyond pursued. That same idea is still evolving when we make a new violin.

We are all still pupils, and we can learn much from many teachers, but we must be able to recognise them. A cultural basis is the ground in which a seed can most easily grow into a tree. It is my opinion that a good violin making school should give to the students not just a technical teaching, but a cultural one as well. Here again, history suggests an intriguing parallel. In the

17th and 18th Centuries, a Cremonese artisan was generally illiterate. As an example, living between the Amati and the Guarneri households was a family of blacksmiths, whose name was Rolla. They were a rich family of active businessmen and had financial dealings with both Giuseppe Guarneri and Antonio Stradivari. As far as I know, all the Rolla family were illiterate. But Nicolò Amati, Andrea Guarneri and Antonio Stradivari could read and write quite correctly. This means that the best violin makers had a better cultural background than the average artisan at that time. A good example for us as well.

One more point. We still have precious little information on many old makers, and need to do serious research to avoid major solecisms. For an example, we can take one of the most incredible misunderstandings: the identity of Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù. Let's imagine this sketch: you know nothing of the Guarneri family and have in your hands six violins. Three are by Giuseppe filius, the son of Andrea Guarneri, three are by Giuseppe Guarneri "del Gesù". All of them have their original labels, so you know that they were all made by a Giuseppe Guarneri between 1690 and 1741. Many indications lead you to believe that the instruments labelled 1690, 1707 and 1720 were made by the same maker, and those labelled 1728, 1737 and 1741 must be attributed to someone else (in fact also the labels are of different kinds). Would you ever guess that the second Giuseppe was the son of

the first? My answer is no!, particularly if you are from Italy, where it is forbidden to give your son your own name. You will probably imagine that the two Giuseppes are related in some way: cousins perhaps, or uncle and nephew. Let me now open up the picture to show you that this situation actually occurred. In the last quarter of the 18th century, the great dealer and collector Count Cozio di Salabue had the opportunity to see many works by the two Giuseppe Guarneri. He understood perfectly well that they were two separate makers. Besides the stylistic considerations, this was testified by the labels, of which there were three different types. The first identified the maker as the son of Andrea, and the last was the "del Gesù" type with the IHS cypher, but in the instruments dated around 1730 there was another label which identified the maker as Ioseph Guarnerius Andreae nepos, which can be translated either as nephew of Andrea or grandson of Andrea.² Cozio assumed Del Gesù was the son of an unknown brother of Andrea. Many influential dealers and luthiers knew Cozio, and shared his opinion, and others surely reached the same conclusion by themselves. For more than a century Del Gesù lost his identity. Later Giovanni Livi, a scholar who worked for the Hill family, found the information in the archives of Cremona that Giuseppe Guarneri son of Andrea did in fact have a son named Giuseppe as well, and at this point it became obvious that he was Del Gesù.

This is the straightforward reading of the events. If someone does not agree, he must bring forward some historical proof against this conclusion. But this proof has never been presented. Nevertheless, during the 65 years since the publication of the Hill book on the Guarneri family, hundreds of books have been published in which Del Gesù is incorrectly identified.

This story shows that it is not easy to have absolute historical information, but it is important and necessary. History is a powerful instrument in our hands, one of the tools which can help us make better violins, and much more: to be better violin makers.³

References:

1)-Frederich Nietzsche, *Unzeitgem, sse Betrachtungen, Zweites Stuck: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie fur das Leben*. I have no idea of the English title, but it cannot be very different from that of this poor article.

2)-Cfr Ignazio Alessandro Cozio Di Salabue, *Carteggio*, Milan 1950. If you are interested in this book, you can both learn Italian or wait for someone to translate it. I am seriously thinking of doing this, but it will probably be quicker for you to learn Italian. The Hills did not believe that an original label with the nepos Andreaea text ever existed (see *The Violin Makers of the Guarneri Family*, London 1931, page 66). To me, here, it does not matter if the label was real or not: Cozio saw it, true or false, and that's all. By the way, a lal is a source of historical information.

3)-Many thanks to Julia and John Dilworth, who revised my english text.

BRIAN HART

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Committee Report

John Topham reports on the recent meeting

On Wednesday 30th. January the management committee had its fifth meeting. It was quite a full session and we had various guests of whom more about later. There was a distinct feeling that things were beginning to get going. We think therefore, that regular reports of committee proceedings should be written. This will let people know what has been decided, what is being planned and the likely schemes for the future. The attendance list was as follows; Marc Soubeyran (Chairman), John Topham (Secretary), Florian Leonhard (Treasurer), John Dilworth, David Rattray, Paul Collins, Christoph Götting, Wilfred Saunders, Alan Ward

and Judith Blackwell. Guests included Jed Murphy, Kai-Thomas Roth, Cornelius Bohane and Shem Mackey (Editor).

The meeting started off with Marc introducing Mr. Cornelius Bohane, managing director of the Strad. We invited him to talk about what arrangements the Strad had made in the past about printing the transcripts of the talks at the Tiverton Conferences. We were concerned about the last paragraph of the article in the January 1996 issue of the Strad written by Brian Yule about the 1995 Conference. At the end of the paragraph he said that the

transcripts would be available in early 1996. Since we understood from Brian Yule that we could go ahead and record all the talks with a view to writing them up ourselves, we were unaware of the arrangement mentioned by Mr. Bohane. We wrote to the Strad and asked what the situation was. Mr. Bohane got in contact with us and explained that they had usually compiled a bound copy of the transcripts themselves as a favour to Colin Wills. After some discussion Mr. Bohane offered to take the material we had gathered and print copies for us at a reasonable price. We took him up on his offer and hopefully we will be selling them for about £15-£17 each towards the beginning of September.

On a more mundane level I then reported that we had to date 205 members, including 10 honorary members, and about 20 members from abroad. Florian reported that to date we had around £2400 in both our accounts.

Jed Murphy, who is a BVMA member, was then invited to talk. He had come to the meeting to explain why it would be a good idea for the BVMA to join the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM). None of us are professional musicians and so membership did not seem appropriate, but as Jed explained it would be a means of raising the BVMA's profile to, as he put it, many thousands of musicians. The ISM has many services to offer which might be useful, but primarily we may be interested in submitting articles to their journals

about the BVMA in general and ourselves as members in particular. We took a vote on it and by majority we decided to go ahead for one year and review it after that. The subscription is £104 per year.

This year's Dartington Conference was next on the agenda. If any of you do not yet know, we will be organising the "front end" of it this year. The Dartington Hall programme does the rest. By "front end" I mean sorting out the speakers and arrangements for music in the evenings. We have decided on six speakers who are as follows; Duane Rosengard, Jan Strick, Prof. Sir James Beament, Peter Oxley, Dr. Peter Klein and Anne Houssay. A leaflet about all of them should be coming through to you soon. We, as members of the BVMA, will get priority booking for the first three weeks after the booking forms are available and £5 off the price of attendance. We will try to expand the number of traders offering goods, but we do not want to turn the event into a trade fair. We will try to accommodate all who wish to come this year. The only limit last time was on the catering. We hope arrangements will be made to offer more meals at another venue. More details nearer the time. Colin Wills has agreed to host the whole event as before which is welcome.

You have hopefully received your "Invitation to the Dance" to be held at Michelmersh in Hampshire. Let's make this a good start for the social side of

the BVMA. It is one of the reasons why we set up the BVMA in the first place!

One of the last things we discussed was the organisation of an Exhibition of British Classical and Living Makers that we plan to hold either in 1997 or 1998. We have been in contact with the Crafts Council and providing we put forward a credible proposal they would be willing to stage the Exhibition in their rooms in North London. Plans include presenting talks and publishing a top quality catalogue. Eight people offered their services to help organise the event - they have effectively become the Exhibition Committee. They are as

follows; Judith Blackwell, John Dilworth, Florian Leonhard, David Rattray, Kai-Thomas Roth, Marc Soubeyran and Alan Ward. It was thought that eight on the committee was a good starting number, but I suspect as things begin to move along a call for extra help will come. They had their first meeting on 20th. February.

The date of the next committee meeting has not been set, but should be around the end of April. Get in touch if you want to attend.

May I wish the best of luck to you and good making!

Erratum

In the last issue of the newsletter, we gave incorrect telephone and fax numbers for the FFI. The correct numbers are as follows; Tel No. 01223 461471, Fax No. 01223 461481. Apologies to anyone who was unable to contact FFI.

German Violin Association AGM

On 17th May the 'Verband Deutscher Geigenbauer und Bogenschmacher e.V.' are holding their AGM in Freiburg. The meeting occurs during an extended weekend lasting from 16th to 19th May. On the 18th May, Tim Baker and Hieronymus Köstler are giving talks on the English Bow and Roman Instru-

ments respectively. The fee for non-members is DM 20.-. For further information contact Gertrud Reuter, Birsigstr. 10, CH-4054 Basle, Switzerland.

Barn Dance

To help us with planning, would all intending participants please return the attendance form (attached to the flyer you received) before the end of March.

Obituary

We are sad to announce the death of one of our members. John Timike died early in January. He was an enthusiastic member and turned up to the early meetings. The last we heard from him was a letter apologising for not being able to attend the IGM. He will be missed.

Letters

Black or streaky - How do you like your ebony?

Dear Members

Following Anna Jenkin's talk in June about the FFI and their work on endangered species, and Roland Ross's article in the last newsletter, I would like to share a few ideas about Ebony. I think it is time to realise that we all have to change our attitude towards ebony. Although I don't deny that a jet black fingerboard might look wonderful, it is nonetheless also true that colour is no guarantee of quality. The use of streaky ebony is in no way detrimental to the quality of an instrument, in fact some people might even like the appearance. Talking to a specialist hardwood supplier, it became clear that the large majority of makers snub streaky ebony without even looking at the actual quality of the timber. I have now started buying ebony with so-

Spanish plea.

A request has been received by the BVMA from a Spanish violin maker/tutor. He states that he would like to come to Britain this summer and spend approximately one month working with a maker here. Payment

List of suppliers

We are currently compiling a list of suppliers to makers and repairers to be published sometime in the not too distant future. We intend to make this list as comprehensive as possible listing wood, varnish, tools, fittings and some of the more unusual items required by violin and

called "visual defects" at a fraction of the price of solidly black ebony.

The other problem is the lack of hardness encountered in most of the ebony available today. This is where research is necessary in the treatment of timber to render it harder. In the meantime I have developed my own solution to the problem. Here is what I do: over a period of up to two weeks I apply many coats of boiled linseed oil with added driers (ratio 3:1). Each coat is applied very thinly and rubbed down the next day back to the bare wood. This process is repeated until the pores are suitably filled, usually taking five or six coats. The penetrative qualities of the oil and its subsequent hardness, once it has cured, renders the wood much harder and leaves it with a very striking lustre.

It is only with simple ideas like this, as well as through more ambitious replanting actions that we all will be able to have an effect to secure timber supplies for the future.

Marc Soubeyran, London.

will not be an issue as he will be in receipt of a grant. Anyone interested! Contact Javier Guraya, Gobelaurre 19, Flat No. 3,48930 Romo,Getxo, Spain. Tel; (00 34) 4 46 34 541.

bow makers. Save others the time and trouble and tell us where you found it, or if you are a supplier yourself, please contact; Paul Collins, The Cottage, Millhill Farmhouse, East Hanningfield Rd. Sandon Chelmsford, Essex CM2 7TF Tel. 01245 473614.

PVA glued? Don't touch it!

Dear members

About the question from: Ian Allan
(BVMA Newsletter issue 2);

Question: What are the recommendations for removal of fronts, necks etc. from an instrument glued with PVA glues.

Answer: Similar to the traditional advice to those about to get married. Don't!

If you think this is unduly negative, perhaps you should consider whether time would be better spent; Getting government (or at least BVMA) warnings attached to all such instruments- "Buyers are warned that, in the event of damage necessitating the removal of parts for repair, repair is likely to be uneconomic."

Educating/persuading insurance assessors for Household Contents Policies (because this is the common arrangement for insurance of such instruments) to accept repairer's recommendations to "write off" damaged instruments, rather than ordering uneconomic repairs.

Selling similar, new, instruments as replacements for damaged ones.

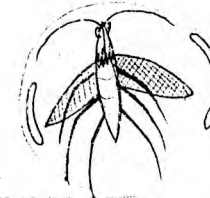
Making new instruments glued with traditional natural glues.

It seems to me that if repairers stopped trying to repair PVA glued instruments they would be doing everybody a favour. manufacturers, dealers, players and the repairers themselves.

Michael Heffer, Cambridge.



DON'T WASTE OLD GLUE! — COLLECT WOOD-BORING CREATURES & ADD TO MELTED ANIMAL GLUE. WHEN THE GLUE SETS YOU WILL HAVE AN ATTRACTIVE JELLY-LIKE PLAQUE TO THROW AT / GIVE TO YOUR OTHER VIOLIN MAKING FRIEND.
(ADD FRASS FOR STABILITY)



(The Bass Bar is CLOSED 'TIL FURTHER NOTICE)