

# Newsletter

of the British Violin Making Association

*Editor: Shem Mackey*

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## "400 Years of Violin Making in the British Isles" EXHIBITION NEWS - LATEST!

John Milnes

New members may not know that the BVMA's boldest project so far is an exhibition of four centuries of violin making in Britain - 100 of the best instruments and bows by the likes of Daniel Parker, Benjamin Banks, Barak Norman, James Tubbs (plus 10 contemporary instruments and bows), all crammed into a fortnight's fiddlefest just before Easter next year in the Royal Academy of Music, London.

*A note for your diary: Monday 30th. March to Easter Saturday 11th April 1998.*

The Exhibition planning committee of BVMA members has been at work for over a year. A lot of the work is obviously not complete and details may change. But here's how things stand now.

**Venue** Royal Academy of Music in the Marylebone Road (just east of the Planetarium/Mme Tussauds). The exhibition will be in the main concert hall (Dukes Hall) with display cases for the instruments and bows arranged around the audience and stage area. Concerts and the symposium will be in the Jack Lyons 250 seat theatre in the same building.

**Symposium** The middle Saturday (4th April) will be a day-long symposium on British violin making - part of the larger idea of the exhibition to spread information on what is known already and present new discoveries.

**Concerts** Sets of instruments representing each of the four centuries will feature in four evening concerts with leading quartets and chamber ensembles.

**Funding** Applications have gone to "Arts for Everyone", the distributor of lottery funds, and to the Foundation for Sports and Arts (We won't get an answer on these applications until August). Major commercial company sponsorship has been tried but with no success so far.

Meanwhile financial backing and enthusiastic support has come from a number of people in the violin trade. Promised finance comes to around 40% of the £95,000 total budget. **To put on a high quality event we need more support.** Offering between 1% and 5% would associate you with the largest show of British talent ever put on, and there are opportunities for advertising (in several cost bands) in the exhibition guide)

*If you would like to find out more about supporting us with sponsorship or advertising please ring*

*Marc Souheyran 0171 241 1064  
or John Milnes 01865 245 751*

*We need your help to make this exhibition a success*

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## AT THE BENCH

*Florian Leonhard besides being treasurer of the BVMA, is a violin restorer with a growing international reputation. He operates out of his premises in north London where Judith Blackwell sought him out for this interview*

Goldhurst Terrace is in the leafy South Hampstead suburb of north west London, and as I approach Florian Leonhard's house I become aware of the opulence surrounding me. Florian is busy with an American client who has arrived for a service on his instrument, a beautiful old Italian violin.

"Florian, when you checked that violin you tapped around the edges with an old piano hammer to see if the front or back had become unglued, why didn't you just use your finger?"

"I learnt this method at 'Hills' and it allows you to hear clearly when the plate is unglued and not just the knocking of the bone."

"So when did you work at 'Hills'?"

"I started at 'Hills' in 1985. My dream, while I was at the violin making school in Mittenwald was 'Hills', but the dream seemed so far away. I visited London, and 'Ealing Strings' and 'Guivier' offered me the possibility of a job after

my schooling, but I still had another year to go. I thought, as I'm here I'll visit 'Hills'. I couldn't believe it, Andrew Hill showed me round and the chemistry was right. He offered me a job

for whenever I liked so I kept in touch over my last year. I showed him a viola I had made, one I had to hide from the school, he liked it and could see what I was trying to do. At the school we all left as good makers, not brilliant and not bad, but there is no space for your own character, which is good for understanding the craft and

discipline, but not good for understanding styles outside of Germany. In my time at 'Hills', it took me years to move away from the style that had been injected in Mittenwald. To compare it with Newark, I think students are left with more of their character. This is why I did this viola at home. I come from a painting



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background and am interested in the old painters from the Gothic period, Renaissance, Baroque to modern times, and as a child I absorbed this, seeing the different styles and schools. I realised from this, you cannot get stuck in one school."

"Were you surrounded by art before you became interested in violins?"

"I have been seriously trying to paint since I was 3 years old. My father is a painter and Professor of Art. My parents never pushed me in this direction but I wanted it. One of the most important lessons I learnt as a child was from my father when painting a locomotive. I asked him how to paint, not just from the side or front but from an angle, and the best possible answer came from him, 'just place it in front of you and paint it as you see it!'. So at 4 years old it was a very important lesson, and one I never forget."

"Did you have any musical influences when you were growing up?"

"My mother studied the violin in Venice, and because of an accident which injured her elbow she had to give up and began studying German literature where she met my Father. But we always had music at home, quartets and things, with me playing the 'cello. I was never as good at this as I was at the painting."

"So how did you go from enjoying painting to wanting to attend the violin school?"

"My grandfather was a chemist and biologist. I enjoyed making slides and using his microscope and decided I wanted to become a surgeon. I didn't

consider soul, I just wanted to make things function properly. In my house as a child I always repaired things, no one else enjoyed doing this. So this combination, the music, the micro-surgery, the painting and the repairing, result in the violin restoration work that I do today. I also found a guitar in the loft when I was 16 years old. I wanted to repair it and had to visit a violin maker to get some wood. I was fascinated."

"So you obviously felt oppressed at Mittenwald, unable to be open with your ideas."

"The attitude of all the teachers, who hadn't done their high school level, was that they all had inferiority complexes. They taught us the way that they had been taught and would not let us think for ourselves. I had long hair that was hated by the teachers, but still I managed to get on with them. But I learnt discipline. Take for example this Francesco Ruggieri 'cello I have here, the arching was badly restored before. Veneers were used causing cracks. I want to get rid of the bad repair but if there were bulges in the back, perfectly natural as it has a slab back and is 350 years old, I wouldn't put my 'perfection' idea into that. You don't want to restore an instrument to make it look new. I made that mistake in the past. In this I use discipline."

"So the repair work has to be of a certain standard before you can say 'leave it' "

"Look, I'll show you on this Ruggieri violin, there's not much left of these corners but there is enough to preserve

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it, which I will try to do, and will only add a new piece where necessary."

"The corners aren't as bad as they look though, there is quite a lot of wood there."

"Exactly, but the ability to make these decisions comes from working on nice violins like this one and having people to teach you who give you knowledge and tips. Because of this, less and less work is done inside like replacing linings or blocks, you can see these are original and very small, the reason why people did replace them in the past. In fact, one very famous firm who we have to thank for the high quality and attitude of restoration today, in the past used to replace many of the corner blocks and linings because it was their 'perfection' idea to make an instrument

function properly. Today we preserve everything that is original, because we enjoy it so much."

"Did this happen when you worked there?"

"No. They were already trying to re-think their own ideas. I know that from Andrew Hills lips he said 'look what my Grandfather did there', with pressing everything, redoing the inside and so on, these times are past. With these words the ground stone was set for me. Looking back I can see that many things that were done can be criticised but we can also see many extremely fine restorations from that company. I apply this re-thinking to what I do today and until I die I will never stop doing this process. We are all human, we should be able and be allowed to question

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ourselves, not be arrogant to think we know it all and not be arrogant when working with other people and tell them 'look only I know it!'

"The blocks on this violin are so small though you can understand someone thinking that for practical reasons they could be replaced"

"It makes sense that they strengthened the ribs because when the ribs don't distort so much the table and the back vibrate in a more efficient way but I would just make sure that they fit well, that nothing rattles, that these loose bits are glued back. It's more effort because you have to insert very small pieces of wood behind, the sort of job I love! You can do this if you have the time and the money, it's of course more expensive than just putting a new block in, but for me that is out of the question. You get into a conflict if an instrument is worth £5,000, I don't really know what to do then"

Having been at 'Hill's' for 4 years Florian had to return to Germany to do his Military Service. The 'conscientious objector' consequently ended up looking after old people. However, while he was still in England, Machold and Florian became acquainted. It was made clear to Florian that the minute he was free a job would be his there. As Florian was leaving the senior post at 'Hills', Machold apologised for not being able to offer him the managers post, so under Marcel Richter, who Florian describes as 'a superb workshop manager', he stayed two and a half years. "While you were at Macholds what was the most

memorable restoration job you undertook?"

"A huge restoration of one of the first 'celli ever built, that was made by Andrea Amati in the 1570's. The instrument had in the past been reduced in size and all of the inside work had already been replaced. There were so many cracks in the front and back, and the blocks had to be replaced again. The ribs that had a lot of worm damage had to be restored and also built up, and I needed to make quite a few plastercasts to enable me to reconstruct the arching. To describe in depth the restoration would take so long!"

"While working in Germany how did you get involved with Withers?"

"Each time I came over for the auctions they approached me. Eventually I thought if it is of benefit to me why not. They offered to treat me like a partner, a very good wage and good prospects and I made it clear that I would only stay for a short time. I'm happy that I did that with Withers. But before I was at Withers I had restoration projects lined up from some clients. I considered setting up on my own but decided to take the job and return to London. Whilst back in London I continued to collect and knew that when the time came for me to set up on my own, I would first of all have to finish and sell these instruments and that would enable me to set-up.

"What made you decide the time was right?"

"I just knew that the cheese was ripe!, and actually my biggest problem was trying to decide where to set-up. I

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thought of Germany, even New York was an option and in the end I had to invite my parents to help me to decide. You are born in a country and you have roots, I did not run away. I found that I always enjoyed England, the English people, the English attitude, and I like the smooth, soft way the British people have, not to be aggressive, and I enjoy the sense of fair play. This I enjoy with my colleagues in London, I have to say I have good relationships with everybody and I'm looking forward to deepen them. I don't feel jealousy or envy to anybody because I also feel that they treat me nicely."

"What are you working on at the moment?"

"At the moment I'm working on this Francesco Ruggieri cello, Cremona

1688. The back is quite nice and here there were funny long studs to strengthen the back and upper part. They warped the wood and I thought because they are visible from the outside I'll press this back into shape. This is an exceptionally straight slab cut back, amazing how apart from the distortions from previous repair, it's a very strong arching and most of the old Italian slab cut backs I know of bulge and distort everywhere, which I wouldn't touch."

"How thick is the back?"

"This is a reasonably thick back, still 8.9mm in the centre without a patch"

"But surly this is why it has lasted and is so structurally sound"

"It is thinner in the top area where I have put this bar along the centre joint, and to avoid a crack I put these wobbles

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in"

"I've never seen this style before...."

"It just occurred to me".

The only way I can describe this bar is that it is the same shape as one of my grandmothers hairpins, but on a much larger scale.

"And what about all these parchment strips, you like them don't you?"

"I'm known for this, I don't use them everywhere but I use them on cracks where the wood is strong enough. Say a violin belly thickness is 3mm and there's a crack, in my view the area is strong enough to be protected by a strip of parchment if it is properly treated. I would not recommend anyone try it directly on a violin, as many things can go wrong. 'Hills' were trying this and developing it and I also went on and tried to find more ways to work with it. It needs to be soaked in water for hours, so it absorbs the maximum of glue, massage it in the hand with the glue, then apply it."

Florian keeps a huge archive of instrument detail. He briefly shows me the standardised document that he uses for cataloguing all his instruments, including photographs, measurements and distinguishing features. One distinguishing feature that has left his workshop recently has caused a stir in other London quarters....

"Why do you stamp your bassbars, don't you think it is a little arrogant?"

"Actually I talked to a colleague yesterday who said maybe I shouldn't do this for commercial reasons because people always immediately know where it comes from. I did this because I think it is like a bridge"

"So is this common practise?"

"Some people do this in France. I put the date as well because I think the date and the name of the workshop where the instrument was opened before, from an idealistic point of view, is a good idea. I now think I'll stop doing this because if I give an instrument to a colleague and he wants to handle it, it's not a good thing. But I still think that 'GEORGE CUNAUULT 1888' who stamped the bassbar on an Amati cello I restored, gave me a reference point. This stamp was the initial idea for me to do this. I originally did it, naively, so that people could come back to me."

"Florian, where do you see yourself in 10 years time?"

"In London, I might have a shop near here, but never a shop where many people come in, the quality would suffer if I deal with everybody, and the quality of the restoration is most important. I hope I can set some standards for some people "

#### BVMA Newsletter Back Issues

Issues 1-8 available, price £1 per copy.

#### Dartington Transcripts 1995

Copies available of Conference featuring Charles Beare, Sam Zygmuntowicz, Carlo Chiesa, Friederich Meyer, Peter Trevelyan etc. Please make cheques payable to "The British Violin Making Association" and send to the Editor (Address on back page)

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## National Violinmaking Competition in Budapest 1997

Tibor Szemmelweis.

The fifth Bowed-instrument making Exhibition and competition was organised by the Hungarian Violinmaking Association and was held between the 9th. and 11th. May in the Musicacademy of Budapest.

A total of 76 instruments by 41 violinmakers were entered in the violin, viola and cello categories.

The president of the violin making jury, J.B. Morassi (Cremona), was joined by judges István Kónya and Laszlo Marosván (Hungary). For the soundjudging there was a chosen jury of 30 professional musicians - 10 for each instrument category. Under direction of the head Professor of the academy, the instruments were judged under the strict conditions of anonymity.

The system of the competition was a little different to the usual.; first all the instruments had to pass through the evaluation of the violinmaking jury. They sorted out the 15 best made (craftsmanship) in each instrument class. Only these 15 instruments entered into the sound competition (a decision based on previous experience of the difficulties in acoustic evaluation of all the entries). Even this reduced number of instruments kept the musicians busy, judging the instruments from different aspects and function.

Results:

|               |      |                           |
|---------------|------|---------------------------|
| <b>Violin</b> | 1st. | <i>Ernö Guminár</i>       |
|               | 2nd. | <i>Robert Blasszaver</i>  |
|               | 3rd. | <i>András Nagy</i>        |
| <b>Viola</b>  | 1st. | <i>Ernö Guminár</i>       |
|               | 2nd. | <i>Balázs Gollob</i>      |
|               | 3rd. | <i>Zsombor Kemény</i>     |
| <b>Cello</b>  | 1st. | <i>Lajos Kónya</i>        |
|               | 2nd. | <i>(No prize awarded)</i> |
|               | 3rd. | <i>Béla Hegyesi</i>       |

At the opening ceremony of the exhibition J.B. Morassi received a state award, handed over by the president of the Hungarian Republic, Árpád Göncz. Stefano Conia received the highest master title and Péter Benedek was given the 'Gold hand' award of the Hungarian chamber's of craftsmen for his outstanding literary work, researching and publishing the history of Hungarian violinmaking. The book, which had it's premiere at the exhibition, has been an outstanding success with it's excellent editing and high quality documentary photographs. The president of the violinmaking association, Tibor Semmelweis, who was the organiser with the help of László Nemessányi, received the commemorative silver medallion of Cremona.

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# Old English Chisels And Gouges

*There is an old saying which goes "A craftsman is only as good as his tools". Whether you believe this or not, tools do have a special place in the life of any artisan and grown men have been known to weep at the loss of a particular favourite. Robin Aitchison takes a look at some old woodworking tools and gives us an insight into the histories of some of the better English toolmakers of the past*

One Thursday morning as a student at Newark, I spent a very frustrating hour attempting to cut the mortice in a violin head with what appeared to be a nice old chisel. With care it was possible to produce a good edge but a few cuts in On the hard, figured wood rendered the tool unusable.

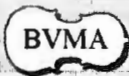
I cut my losses and cycled off to the tool stall at Newark market. For £2.50 I bought a Ward and Payne chisel that I had had my eye on. Soon the tool was sharpened up and I was able to complete

the job without re-sharpening at all. (I recently had these two chisels tested for hardness. To my amazement there was not a dramatic difference: one, possibly two points in Rockwell Hardness. So what makes a good chisel? It is certainly not just hardness). As a craftsman I can be very clear about what makes a good chisel. It should be easy to sharpen and then stay sharp for a long time. Tools that meet these criteria often have the following characteristics:



I&H Sorby gouge (Hanging Sheep trademark)

I Sorby Chisel (Mr. Punch trademark)



- The metal has quite a dull grey colour even when honed (unlike many modern tools).
- The metal has a characteristic feel when worked on a stone. It grinds down by hand quite readily and produces a burr (or wire edge) which becomes detached easily (when the tool is turned over on the stoned and worked on the other side) leaving a fine edge.

## Modern Tools

Very early on in my experimentation with edge tools, I found that I was getting better results with older tools than I was with late 20th century or brand new tools. My experience of new tools is therefore limited and I am aware that my belief in the superiority of 19th century tools could be likened to a string player's prejudice against modern instruments. However, there is a significant difference - old tools are cheaper than new ones.

One source of good new tools is Japan. Some experienced craftsmen prefer fine Japanese edgetools to old English ones, so if you can afford the 500% price premium and you know exactly what you want, this may be a good alternative.

## What to buy

Over the past eight years I have bought well over 100 chisels and gouges. Tools that seem to stay sharp have remained at the bench, those that forever need sharpening, I have sold back into the tool trade. The vast majority of the edge tools at my bench are made by 'I Sorby'.

'Ward and Payne' and 'Herring Brothers'. For me these makers emerge as a clear super-league. I also own quite a number of Addis gouges. They do not have quite the staying power of a Herring Brothers gouge but there are lots of them about and they come in all sorts of unusual curves and widths. Also extremely common are Marples tools. I have never had much joy with Marples tools and I have given up trying, but a very knowledgeable friend says he has an early one which is a real gem.

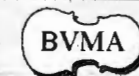
There are hundreds of less common makers, some good, some bad, some variable. Every tradesman could produce a different list of their favourites. It's worth bearing in mind that some of these tools may be factored products from a very big company specialising in a different sort of tool like rules or planes, whilst others may be the work of a local blacksmith.

## History of important makers

Most of the information is taken from W.L. Goodman's book British plane makers which is now in its third and will be compulsive reading for anyone interested in old tools (500 pages, published by Roy Arnold at £27.50). To avoid confusion I have included information about I&H Sorby and Robert Sorby.

## I Sorby

Founded by Isaac Sorby in Sheffield. Ownership of this brand changed hands eleven times in under a century. The last firm to use the trademark was Turner, Naylor & Co which by 1909



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was wholly owned by William Marples & Sons.

The fact that the I Sorby and "Mr. Punch" trade mark passed through so many owners makes me wonder what you actually get when you buy an I Sorby tool. However, it is certain that if the trademark had been used on lesser quality tools it would soon have become devalued and no longer worth using. My experience of I Sorby is that they are consistently excellent.

**I & H Sorby**

Started around 1800 by John Sorby in Sheffield. Was acquired by Turner, Naylor & Co. (i.e. Marples) by 1932. This maker was a major producer of sheep shears and used a well known hanging sheep trade mark. The edge tools are very good and the sheep

appears to be suspended quite humanly around its middle.

**Robert Sorby**

Started in 1828 in Sheffield and was based for over 100 years at the Kangaroo works Sheffield. Uses a Kangaroo trademark. Wood turning tools are still sold under this name.

**Ward and Payne**

Founded in 1803 by David Ward in Sheffield. Henry Payne became a junior partner in the company in 1845 but died in 1850. I suspect that the company hung onto his name to differentiate themselves from another tool maker called Ward. In 1911 the company published a 501 page illustrated catalogue; many of the tools shown were factored but those of their own making included shovels and spades, forks,

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sheep shears, carving tools, chisels and gouges. The firm's distinctive trademark shows crossed forging hammers above an anvil with the initials W and P to the sides. Ward and Payne tools are not so common as I Sorby but are every bit as good.

**Herring Brothers**

The Herrings were a five-generation family of edge tool makers originating in Sheffield with Thomas Herring (born 1774). In the third generation another Thomas Herring moved to London and became very closely associated with the London based Addis firm of edge tool makers. Marrying Harriet Addis in 1853 and continuing to work with her father, Samuel Addis, after Harriet died in childbirth. By 1869, Thomas' brother Edwin had moved down to London to join the business and a trade directory from the period lists them as *Herring, Edwin and Thomas with premises at 19 Gravel Lane, Southwark and 12&14 Rue edition Daval, Paris*. These are undoubtedly the Herring Brothers whose trademark is found on many gouges. The business also grew under the management of the fourth generation Edwin John (who at some point owned 17 properties) but ended tragically in 1941 when the fifth generation Edwin took his own life in his factory shortly after his son was lost at sea in a submarine.

Herring Brothers gouges are outstanding. One also comes across Herring and Sons tools from a Sheffield part of the family. They are less

common and, in my experience, not so good.

Both Herring brothers and Addis stamp the words PRIZE MEDALS onto their tools. They refer to medals awarded at international trade exhibitions such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Kensington.

**Addis**

This firm was started in London by Samuel Joseph Addis. By 1872 the firm had moved to Sheffield under Mr. J.B. Addis. At some point in the interim manufacture was sub-contracted to Ward and Payne who stamped their mark onto the tools (see photograph no?). After the move, the tools are stamped JB Addis and Sons. The following Trade directory says a lot about Mr. JB Addis.

*1872 Under the distinguished patronage of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. The Princess of Teck. Lord Lichfield - Carving tools, J.B. Addis. Arctic Works, Sheffield.*

*J.B. Addis - Carving Tool Manufacturers begs most respectfully to inform the Merchants & Manufacturers of Sheffield and the neighbourhood that he is the only manufacturer of the name of ADDIS in any part of the United Kingdom making carving tools and Mr. J. B. Addis also begs to say that he has ceased to have any connection with the firm of Ward & Payne, Sheffield. all orders entrusted to Mr. J.B. Addis will be executed with prompt attention and in his usual superior style for which he obtained Prize Medals in 1822, 1851, 1870 and 1871 and also a gold Medal subscribed*

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by the Merchants, Manufacturers and workmen of Sheffield for superior workmanship. All orders to be addressed J.B. Addis.

#### William Marples and sons

The origins of this company can be traced back to 1828 when William Marples was released from apprenticeship. Through generations of Marples family management the firm became the most prolific of the Sheffield hand tool manufacturers. Marples bought out Turner, Naylor & Co. (I Sorby) in 1932. It is often the case that financial success does not go hand in hand with dedication to quality and in my experience Marples edge tools do not match those of the firms that Marples bought out. The company still trades but since 1983 it has been part of the Record Ridgeway Group.

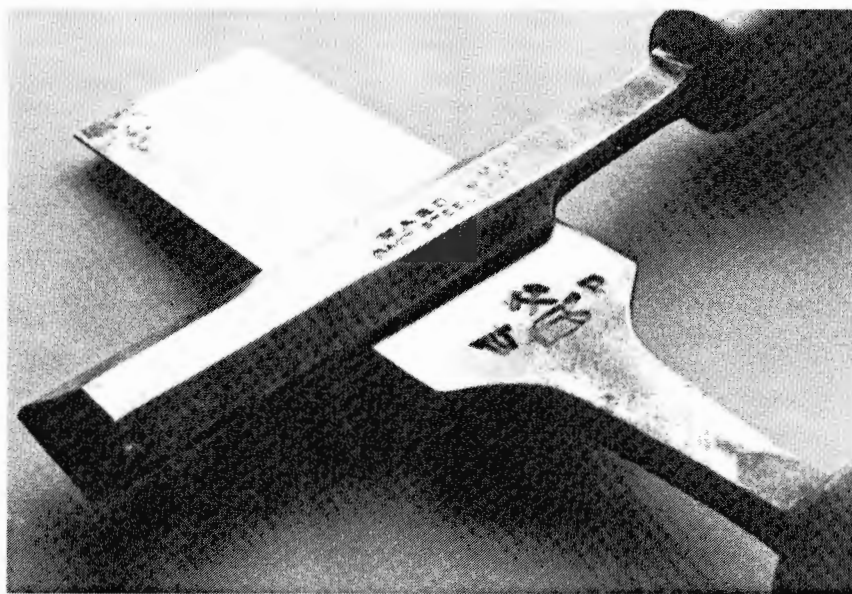
Where to find old tools.....

#### Markets

Hundreds of tool dealers sell their stock primarily at street markets across the country. Some dealers travel to cover several markets in a week. They often buy their stock on long expeditions, meeting up with contacts who have responded to adverts the dealers have placed in local newspapers.

#### Specialist old tool shops

There are a number of these around the country. Because they have higher overheads and hold more stock their prices tend to be higher than market stalls. They tend to stock more collectable big ticket items (like planes) but some boast huge selections of carving tools.



Stamps and Brands on Ward & Payn Chisels

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#### Auctions

Auctions are at the heart of the tool trade and the details of the auctioneers are listed below. I have only been to the David Stanley Auctions and can recommend a visit as a day out. The advantages are that you can view 1000 lots of old tools and you only pay trade price. The disadvantages are that sometimes the tool you want will be part of a big lot and there is a great deal of hanging around. A big bonus for attending an auction is the trading that goes on in the car park before and during the auction. The catalogue for a David Stanley International sale (photographs and estimates for all lots) is an education in itself.

David Stanley auctions,  
Stordon Grange  
Osgathorpe  
Leicestershire LE12 9SR  
Tel (01530) 222420  
2 International, 4 Domestic sales per annum

TonyMurland's Tool auctions  
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Needham Market  
Suffolk IP6 8AN  
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1 International, 3 domestic sales per annum

Conditions of Old Tools.....

Chisels and gouges are relatively simple tools and there's not much that can go wrong with them. The thing to avoid at all costs is pitting at the cutting edge, particularly on the face that you wish to

grind flat. If you are buying a long (pattern maker's) chisel, look out for twist (to which these tools are prone). It is inevitable that almost any old tool purchased will need some work to get it into a usable condition but this is also true for a lot of new tools on the market.

How much to pay.....

As a rough guide for good quality tools  
Gouges £4 - 6 trade £5 - £10 retail  
Chisels £2 - 5 trade £3 - £8 retail  
Various factors can increase the price of a tool e.g.:

Very long tools

Very wide tools

Lovely boxwood handles

Pristine condition sets in original manufacturers boxes etc.

More information.....

For anyone wishing to know more I can strongly recommend the Tools and trades History Society (TATHS) at 60 Swanley Lane, Swanley, Kent BR8 7JG, Tel (01322) 667721 as an abundant source of enthusiasm and information.

Also some useful books are:

W L Goodman.

British Planemakers from 1700 3rd edition - Roy Arnold 1993

Jim Kingshott

Making and Modifying Woodworking Tools. Guild of Master Craftsmen Publications Ltd. 1992

Ken Roberts Some Nineteenth Century Toolmakers? Publisher Reprinted 1989

acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Chris Hudson (TATHS) and Jonathan Garrard for their enormous help while researching this article.

Essay from anonymous Newark Student.

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## STEAMED SEAMS

*Gluelines are not a problem for Glyn C Jones. He explains how using steam power can pull those plates together!*

Here is a useful process for those amongst us (and I'm sure we've all been there at least once), where, through a lapse in concentration, or in our technique, we find that dreaded glue line that appears down the centre of our jointed back or belly plate ... probably the back.

This is caused by either our shooting plane blade being out of square or uneven, or, the joint moving as it is cramped up once glued. What may appear a perfectly good joint at first glance, as we proceed to work the wood it can happen that this imperceptible joint gradually darkens to give us a fine line of glue where there should be wood. So, undaunted, as we grab the saw, saw down the line and start again ... right? Well, dear friends, if that unwelcome glue line runs the entire length of the plate, then probably the answer will be yes, however, if we find that only a portion of the joint, say a few inches in length, has failed us, then try this useful technique:

First of all, continue working the plate until it is in a finished condition, that is, arched outside, scooped inside and thickened and scraped all over. Now you can properly assess the extent of the bad joint, furthermore, this process will work much better on thinner wood. Next obtain a small kettle or similar, that has a whistle or cap that fits over the spout. (I use an old camping kettle).

Modify the cap or whistle to accept a short piece of metal tubing that has been bent and shaped as in Fig. 1. I found that a large blob of Epoxy adhesive was sufficient to secure it in place.

Having prepared our steam generator, all that remains is to fill about one third with water and bring it to the boil, and turn down the heat so that we get a continuous stream of steam coming from the pipe. Too much water or too much heat will give us a condition whereby the nozzle is spitting out water as well as steam, that is to be avoided. We must also consider the safety implications regarding steam and closed vessels etc.

Once we have achieved a smooth flow of steam, we then apply it to the affected joint, alternating between both upper and lower surfaces equally, and confining the application of steam to the glued joint only, this we continue to do, moving the steam along the bad joint right up to the ends. After a few minutes, we will see that the joint will have closed tight.

The effects of this process are chiefly twofold:

First, the combination of heat and moisture on the glue inside the joint causes it to soften and subsequently become fluid again, and secondly, the moisture in the steam becomes absorbed by the wood that is immediately adjacent to the joint and causes it to swell. With the liquefied glue in the

joint in a condition that can be displaced, then the wood will expand in the direction of the joint, thus closing it. It must be accepted that by liquefying the glue, in effect diluting it with water, we will have significantly weakened it, so once the joint area is completely dry and the glue has set once more, we must apply studs across the affected joints to reinforce it.

Furthermore, if we are treating a plate that has more than one bad area along its length, then we must treat each one in turn before proceeding to the next otherwise we will risk causing the plate halves to mis-align or at worse detach altogether.

I have successfully used this process only twice, and only on new build plates, but I feel that the principle may have other useful applications elsewhere within our discipline, perhaps in restoration.

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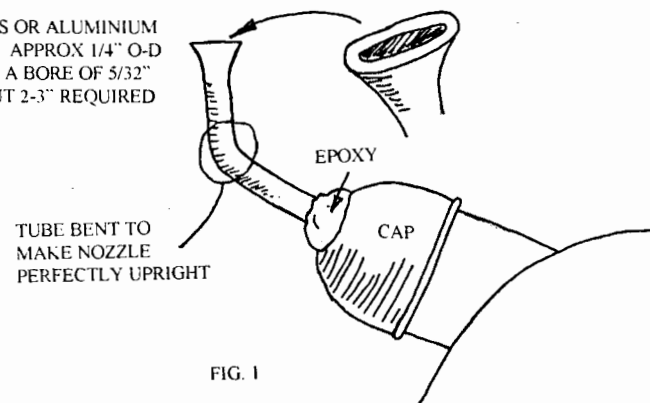
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It would be interesting to hear from someone who is in a position to try other applications that this process may be useful for - apart from making the tea!

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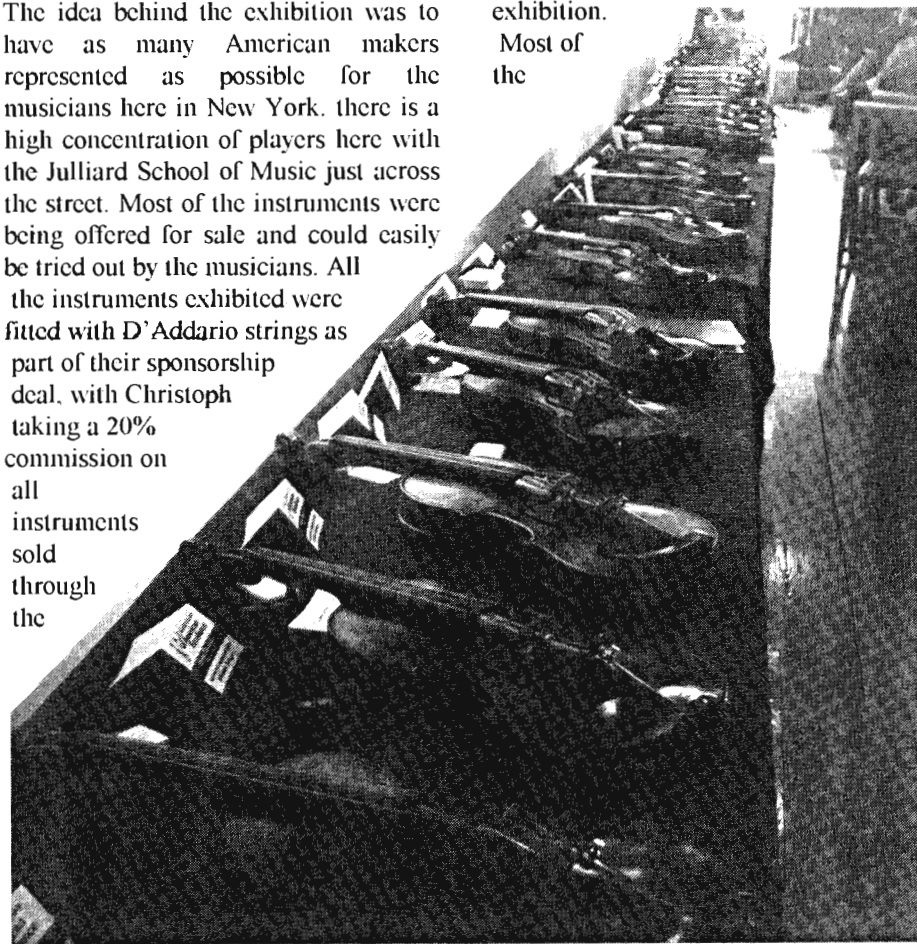
## Christophe Landon Exhibition Michael Hill

*If I won \$15,000 on the lottery, I could dream of a dozen ways to spend it, and buying a modern violin would come low on my wish list. However with fears of a Wall Street crash, an unstable global economy, and an upsurge in modern making, it could also prove to be a wise investment.*

*Last April, Christophe Landon and D'Addario Strings hosted a weekend entitled a "Celebration of American Excellence" at the Landon Gallery-just a spit along the corridor from me. What was instantly appealing to this Yorkshireman was (no, not a roomful of sheep!), but the fact that the entire event including wine was free!*

The idea behind the exhibition was to have as many American makers represented as possible for the musicians here in New York. there is a high concentration of players here with the Julliard School of Music just across the street. Most of the instruments were being offered for sale and could easily be tried out by the musicians. All the instruments exhibited were fitted with D'Addario strings as part of their sponsorship deal, with Christoph taking a 20% commission on all instruments sold through the

exhibition.  
Most of the



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makers were thrilled to be involved, many receiving inspiration from the musicians who were able to give them instant feedback. This created a lively atmosphere that was at times overpowering with a dozen violins being played at once in the gallery!

There was no competition as part of the weekend so there was a broad spectrum of talent, quality and price on display. Christophe later told me that he wished to encourage as many amateur makers to be involved as possible, believing that there were some great Italian violins made by unknown amateur makers. Although it doesn't mean that someone who has had a lack of formal training or who is not earning a living from their making cannot still produce some great violins. I really enjoyed the fact that all shapes and sizes were welcome and in America that's saying a lot! This included a violin shaped like a cowboy boot with pistol shaped f's.

Before Elmar Oliveira brought the first night to a climactic finish he spoke briefly about the wonderful melting pot of American culture, pointing out that he is of Portuguese extraction, Christophe is of course French and D'Addario were originally an Italian company. Elmar played an energetic programme which included: Rachmaninoff/Gingold-Op34, Saint-Saens no.1, Chausson-Poeme Op25 and Kroll-Bango+Fiddle.

He played wonderfully and with great passion, and certainly did not hold back from testing his Curtin & Alf replica copy of his 1726 'Lady Stretton' del Gesu. In fitting with the rest of the

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exhibition Elmar played with D'Addario's Quantum A+E and on the G+D new strings, as yet unnamed. It was during the Saint-Saens that Elmar really took his Curtin & Alf for a test drive almost taking the treble C-bout clear off and shedding Gregg Alf's nerves in the process!

There were several lectures spread over the weekend covering a wide range of topics including Norman Pickering on string technology (see separate report) : also Todd Reynolds who was one of the last pupils of Jascha Heifetz, conducted a seminar on the natural form of improvisation. Based in New York he now performs a fusion of Jazz, folk and

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modern rock. During Sunday afternoon Laurinel Owen demonstrated the proper selection of cello's and their bow's.

By Saturday morning all the exhibitors had arrived, with a total of over 80 makers represented, giving the players plenty of choice. The logistics of bringing this together so successfully was handled by Sandy Neill. Among those present were some of the internationally recognised makers, including Gregg Alf (Ann Arbor). His violin was based on a del Gesu model that was a move away from his reproduction models that he has made with his partner Joseph Curtin. Gregg is now trying to work on developing his own style within the classical tradition. The violin was well made and confident in style (priced at \$18,500).

Moes & Moes (Connecticut) brought a violin based on their own model. The Moes's don't make reproductions as a rule, choosing to let their instruments age naturally, having seen their violins from ten years ago it seems to work well for them. With age, the slightly cloudy/opaque varnish when fresh, transforms into an attractive transparent varnish that develops a charming natural crackle (priced at \$18,000).

One of the lesser known makers was a Californian called Shinguan Zhae who produced a very neat, well made violin

with a pale orange varnish which, like the rest of his work, had been applied very well. In between looking over the violins I decided to browse through some of the glossy brochures which accompanied some of the maker's displays. These seem to have become more extravagant and professional over the last few years. I have to admit David Gusset's amused me with a quote he had printed calling him the 'San Francisco Strad'.

The youngest maker to exhibit was 19 year old Mark Hough who brought along the second violin he had made as an apprentice to the Connecticut maker Lawrence Wilke. This instrument caused some intrigue because his work looked more mature than only his second violin. It showed a good understanding of line and form within the classical style (price \$5,500).

The last instrument that caught my eye was an attractive viola made by George Blum, a maker whom I'd not heard of before. The instrument had a warm feeling and was really very attractive. It had a reproduction dark red Chanot type varnish, on a brown ground that worked well. The varnish also had nice wear patterns with thick chipping around it's edges. On learning that the price tag was only \$6000, it made this instrument a very attractive buy. In the end I had no money, but it was nice to dream.

BB

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Big Butt Productions.

(The report on Norman Pickering's talk on string technology will appear in issue 9)

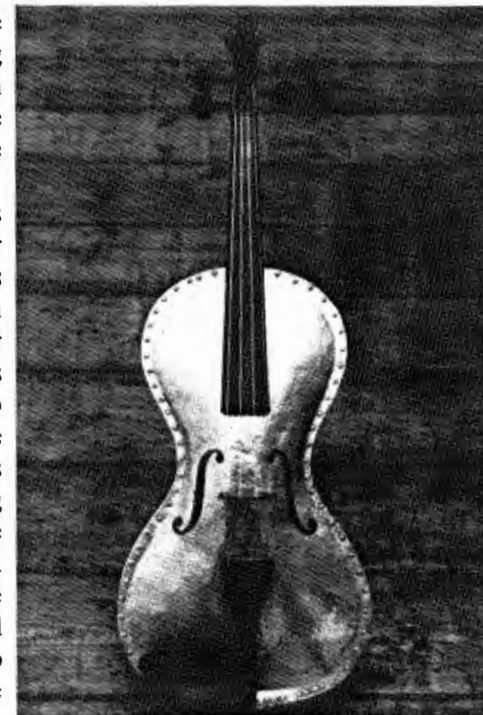
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## Revolution Instruments ...A slightly different approach.

Aluminium and Titanium Alloys in instrument making.

*Every so often a rather eccentric individual pops up with the crazy idea of building violins from some weird material. Nicholas Herbert is happy to maintain this tradition and hidden away behind Kings Cross this maverick, who incidentally was trained as a sculptor, artist and inventor, beavers away on the shape of violins to come.*

For centuries instrument makers have sought the finest materials for making instruments that perhaps would have a new or better sound. Aside from the decorative aspects of the materials the most important property is efficiency. We all are aware of wood that is porous and soft being the worst material for instrument making because it absorbs sound so well. If you can imagine a violin made of damp cardboard for example it would be rather quiet! This may all sound very obvious but if we go back to square one and analyse materials for their acoustic properties we may make some interesting discoveries. Materials need to have three main properties and the first is a high strength to weight ratio, the second is the ability to conduct sound and third the ability not to absorb sound. If we look to the aerospace industry we find a wealth of high strength to weight materials, the most common being Aluminium, Magnesium and Titanium alloys, most of which may be used with some of the high-tech cements and adhesives now available. I have located from an American company a Titanium alloy which is easy to work and may be used with the range of adhesives available in this country. It



is a very permanent material (does not corrode or rust etc.) and being a metal has the property of not absorbing sound but will transmit sound very well. The adhesives I use completely fill a join and as they have no gas bubbles they also transmit sound rather like water (physics lessons at school taught us how far and how well sound can travel in water).

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In 1982 I was trying desperately to find the finest wood for building instruments while running a small repair shop in Camden Lock London. I seemed to want materials that did not exist, for none of the wood I looked at on the market met the criteria outlined above. I had been making electric violins in aluminium alloy and noticed that the material had a consistency of tone that enabled me to tailor the sound output, so that the instruments could have the sound of a typical 19th century French, German or Italian violin, to satisfy the demands of my particular customers. The electronics were designed and built in collaboration with and by John Dyus who incidentally is the only competent electronics engineer and inventor who has managed to raise his craft to a pure art form with an unmatched vision for the future that I have ever encountered. The transducer system used at the time was a pair of very high output and high impedance reformed piezo crystal blocks polarised in opposite directions in the base of the bridge driving a balanced field effect transistor impedance matching device with one gain control and the overall effect would have made the most ardent of hi-fi buffs wet themselves.

The sheer efficiency of the aluminium alloys used at this time amazed me and the seeds were soon sown for the birth of a truly acoustic instrument. I purchased some off-the-shelf alloy sheet with a good acoustic quality which stood in my workshop for two years while I sought an opportunity for some

research and development into a brave new violin. Before the violin was made I decided that one would have to do quite a bit of groundwork in order to satisfy a sort of paranoid fear of the first violin failing to meet expectations and so I made twenty five experimental guitars using various alloys in their construction. Every instrument has been used professionally and a few are in current use and highly prized by their owners. Some are acoustic-electric and have a clarity and tonal range never made possible by their wooden counterparts. It was now time to make the first alloy violin using the most up to date materials available. A larger body than usual was chosen for the design to satisfy my paranoia that the G-string might not have enough power and the corners were left off for the sake of simplicity. The plates were hand thickened and formed and the sides were made of off-the-shelf alloy. The back was folded on with adhesive and it was decided to use very small pop rivets and adhesive for the front so that it could be readily taken apart to satisfy the aforementioned paranoia, the neck of course being quite standard and made of wood. The G-string turned out to be too powerful and almost sounded like a viola but the other strings were also quite strong and we soon found that all the dreams had come true and an instrument of far greater tonal range had been made and the sound it produced could not be differentiated from a wooden instrument when played in an adjoining room. This simple test was repeated with several different

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professional violinists and their own instruments. They had to play the alloy violin more quietly to make the test a fair one. Even in this crude first attempt at an alloy violin I had an instrument which was louder and clearer than its wooden equivalent. Since then seven more violins have been made and five are in private hands. The money paid for more research, development and design and two years on I am about to produce the titanium alloy model alongside a carbon-fibre violin with obvious acoustic-electric and electric hybrids. On the subject of design, some of the guitars had the body reversed so that one could easily reach the high positions without having the acoustically damaging cutaway found on jazz guitars; also most of the

strutting on the front of the instrument was on the outside in order that it may be finely tuned after the instrument was assembled to remove any wolf notes. I do not at present think that the basic design of the violin can be improved however I am openmindedly working on a design which has three basic chambers rather than the two adjoining chambers of the conventional violin. This looks rather like a three-leaved clover with different sized leaves and lends itself to being made of alloy with possible uses for folk music. Another variation on design was an eight string violin, unison tuned, which I used in an experiment where a heavy layer of chrome plating was deposited over the instrument. The result was an

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instrument too muted to be of any practical use.

Obviously a lot of useful information was spawned in the years of development of an alloy instrument and some ideas are now being passed back to the making of wooden instruments. The most important of these ideas is a new approach to the design of the bass bar, and I now use not one but two to five bass bars in violins made of wood with a completely new design and concept for the bridge, which uses the grain of the bridge vertically rather than horizontally, to complement them. I am hoping one day to say that the metal violins will be "also available in wood".

Because I am on the edge of the manufacturing industry I am afraid that all the ideas in this article remain my intellectual property and are for study only. I retain the copyrights etc... all for obvious reasons.

I am hoping to have another exhibition of paintings, sculpture and musical instruments later on this year and any recipients of this newsletter are welcome to give me their names and addresses if they would like a free invitation.

*Nicholas Herbert London. Phone only 0171 278 5704.*

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## Rehairing Weekend

Paul Jefferies

The Bate collection of Musical Instruments is situated at the edge of Oxford, two minutes from the centre. It houses an impressive array of woodwind and keyboard instruments, but hidden away upstairs is a collection of fine bows, and the entire contents of William C Retford's home workshop.

The purpose of my visit however was to learn the art of bow re-hairing. This weekend course, along with a bow making week during the summer is organised by the faculty of music who enlist the help of Andrew Bellis, a bow maker from Bournemouth, to teach his techniques.

The programme kicked off at ten o'clock Saturday morning: armed with coffee and biscuits we listened to an informal lecture on the history of Bow making in Britain. This discourse continued throughout the morning interspersed with mumblings over the evils of superglue as he removed the components of a volunteered bow.

Andrew Bellis only uses glue at one stage of a bow re-hair, and that is to glue in the ferrule wedge; his argument is that if it is done correctly then the mechanics of the system will exert enough pressure to hold everything in place. This theory is tested after tying off the hair hank by selecting a central hair and snapping it out: if there is no

sound, then the hair the has slid out - start again.

In the demonstration bow, because of the excessive use of superglue to hold the ends of the hair together, it had glued itself into the mortise. In this situation the hair has to be carved out of the mortise. Andrew argues that the tying off procedure should hold all the hair without the use of superglue, animal glue, or melted rosin; furthermore it is bad practice to rely on glues to correct a poor technique.

The stubborn slide could not be removed with a dampened thumb, the next stage is to use a little powdered rosin applied to afore mentioned appendage for extra purchase, still this had no result. Andrew was delighted to show us a trick of the trade for this common occurrence...

Roll a square of masking, tape sticky side out, around a 1.8mm drill bit [time for a stupid question!] place this on the slide and adhere one's left thumb to it. Taking a 2oz. leather hammer give the ferrule one sharp thwack, and the slide will move (and it did!).

Once the bow stick is devoid of hair, Andrew cleans it using methylated spirit (for oil varnish; turpentine for alcohol varnish), then polishes it using a yellow duster. He emphasises that this is an important aspect that is often overlooked.

Sunday was the day of hands on learning, and tying off is the technique to get a handle on. Andrew uses fishing line with a strength of 18lbs (except Double Bass: 32lbs) to tie the hair hank.

He learnt this technique from his teacher Arthur Baltitude, who experimented with different mediums after the quality of Irish linen thread declined. Apparently, when Ireland joined the EEC the use of urine to treat thread was banned, so substitute chemicals were used. This removed the last few vital Newtons of strength needed for bow re-hairers. Personally I think that wasn't the only place the urine was being removed!

Before reassembling the bow, Andrew lubricates the slide with graphite (2H), and the adjusting screw with castor oil (metal to wood), and Vaseline (metal to metal).

The hair is combed for a final time, tidied again using a hot air gun, this softens the hair, and it expands, on cooling the individual strands become a uniform length due to the tension of the bow. The hair is then cleaned with methylated spirit prior to liquid rosin being applied. Liquid rosin is used to penetrate all the way through the hair.

After my initial concern over the lack of hands on learning, I am glad that I went despite spending far too much in various licensed establishments around Oxford. New friends were made, and new skills learnt in an enjoyable weekend. With fourteen victims it would be impossible for Andrew to teach if we were all combing hair, but we all tried to tie-off the hair and each of us came away with a wedge that we had carved! Now I am ready to practice my skills, so if there are any old bows on offer give me a call.

## Secretary's 'mini' report.

John Topham

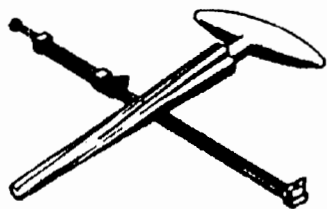
Out of the approximate 260 members who were mailed renewal notices, up to today about 160 have returned. As well as them in the past month we have gained 7 more new members.

When returning renewal forms, particularly those from abroad, please make out cheques in pounds sterling drawn up on a British bank or at least a bank with an address in Britain. With any other cheques or bank drafts, we have to pay the bank charges which makes it a little unfair for other members. Those of you from Europe, eurocheques are fine.

The vast majority of you are sending back the renewal slips along with your cheques, and that's great, but some of you don't. Please include your slip as it makes it much easier for me to record.

Dartington says the bookings are almost exactly the same as they were last year with, as from Friday last week, 67 places booked so far. So plenty of places are still available!

To repeat a plea from the exhibition committee when the time comes, we will need volunteers to help set up the cases, etc. before the event. Can I put in my two-penny's worth and call for volunteers. Get in touch with Marc (our chairman) or Shem (our editor) and give us your support!



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## Wolf Notes

Marc Soubeyran

In this article I would like to start to examine causes explanation and possible remedies for a perennial problem in our trade: the wolf note. I understand it to be the pitch of the air chamber of the instrument. When you play that note the air chamber draws energy from the vibrating string in order to vibrate itself, thus creating a breakdown in energy for the string and resulting in the all too familiar wobble. It is therefore clear to me that every instrument has a wolf note. The question is, can it be played? If not, what can we do about it?

When confronted with an instrument with a wolf problem ( mostly on cello) Two things need to be done:

A. reduce the string tension on the instrument

B. slow down the transmission of the vibrations into the body of the instrument

A. can be achieved by the following: - use of softer strings

- shorten the distance between bridge and tailpiece ( either with a longer tailpiece or a longer tailgut) in order to reduce the overall string length

- lower the bridge as much as possible

- setting the neck to a flatter angle

B. can be achieved by the following:

- if the instrument is fitted with a Belgian bridge, changing for a French pattern bridge will help

- keep more wood at the top of the bridge, either by lowering the heart or keeping it thicker, and make it thinner at the feet.

- in case of cello bridge cut the arch squarer

- fit a slightly thicker and softer soundpost

Of course, adjusting the soundpost is also important, in order to shift the wolf to a different note, as well as experimenting with wolf eliminator, both behind the bridge and glued to the inside of the front.

I think we would all like to know through the channel of the newsletter if anybody has further or different experiences with wolf notes.

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### **Renaissance Wax**

I was very happy to read the introduction of Renaissance Wax in our last issue (number 7) by Louise Dandy, because I think it is amongst others an excellent medium to clean and finish varnish surfaces on violins.

I hope this wax will become a convincing alternative to many who polish violins regularly with resin based polishes like Benzoe.

This does afford a change of attitude and taste because the purpose of polishing with Benzoe, or similar preparations, is to achieve a shiny, even and apparently 'clean' surface. For the instrument's sake, restorers as well as players, in my view, have to learn to enjoy varnish structures like pores, shrunk varnish, craquelet and natural wear. These attributes cause the varnish surface to appear silky-matt and that's how it should be. This is part of the typical features of a particular maker and should be preserved. If the wax is first applied with some cotton wool and polished off with a fine cloth it will leave a protective micro-thin layer against sweat and dust. Renaissance Wax doesn't harm the original varnish surface structure; neither does it dissolve the varnish. Because it can be removed with an agent (White Spirit) that is not harmful to varnish, it is ideal to conveniently service the instrument. The dirt and dust possibly accumulating on the protective surface with this method of servicing instruments can be

easily removed. Also when it is necessary to retouch an area on the instrument, Renaissance Wax can be completely removed with White Spirits in order to allow the retouch varnish to adhere to the surface. Afterwards the wax can be re-applied and the retouched area tones in beautifully under the silky wax film. More information on this particular medium can be found on pages 27-28 of BVMA newsletter issue No. 7.

Florian Leonhard.  
London.

### **U.V. cabinets and Ozone**

It is extremely doubtful if any significant ozone is produced by a class A UV lamp (400-320nm), which is the one to use for curing varnish. Minute quantities are produced by a class C lamp (290nm downwards) which can be used to brown wood, and is to be treated with great caution because of its effect on eyes and skin. Even then the amount of ozone produced is far below toxic levels. One can smell ozone at 1 part in 50,000. Everything has been made more poisonous by passing the Health and Safety Acts, but ozone is not listed in the schedules of substances hazardous to health, or in association with UV lamps or photocopiers.

Very few people have ever smelled ozone; it is quite like chlorine, produced by hypochlorite household bleach. The reason is that even if one

can make it by electrical discharge, far larger quantities of nitrogen oxides are also always produced, and the pungent smells associated with lamps and photocopiers are of nitrogen oxides.

Ozone disappears very rapidly in ordinary circumstances because it combines with almost any organic substance. It is a powerful sterilising agent and used to be pumped into the Central Line of London Underground to 'clean the air'! If anyone is still worried, standard materials for absorbing ozone are linseed oil or real turpentine, so that the instruments in the drying cabinet are providing the best protection, and the ozone, if any, will be assisting the first chemical stage of polymerising the oil

Prof. Sir James Beament.  
Cambridge

### **Violins for Africa**

Eighteen months ago, Yehudi Menuhin returned to south Africa after an absence lasting almost as long as the apartheid regime was in power. I attended a workshop for music teachers which he held in Cape town, and met a number of dedicated teachers, including Ronnie Samaai. I told Ronnie that for many years I had sat on the Anti-Apartheid Committee of the British Association of concert agents; it had been extremely difficult to ascertain the needs of young disadvantaged musicians in South Africa; and I would be grateful for his advice. "Violins" came the immediate answer, "small ones, for small children." I was surprised; weren't violins considered

rather 'Eurocentric' in the present political climate? "Not at all," he replied. "We have literally dozens of kids lining up to learn to play. The problem is, we don't have any instruments."

Back in Europe, I set about writing to some violin makers, whose addresses I picked at random from 'The Strad'. The response was overwhelming. Replies came in from countries as far a field as Argentina, Hungary, Australia, the United States, Russia, France, Switzerland; the British donors were Martin Restall of Winchester, Rachel Douglas of Frederick Phelps Ltd., Thwaites of Oxhey, and Michael Heffer of Cambridge. Some two hundred instruments have been promised altogether.

This meant finding somewhere to store them, and Peter Biddulph of J P Guivier Ltd. came to my rescue with an offer of storage space. His fellow director, Richard White, took on the immense task of cataloguing the instruments, valuing them, and then set about repairing them - many arrived in poor condition, and needed new pegs or a bridge or strings, and most of the bows required re-hairing. Painstakingly Richard put odd violins together with the right size of bow; each instrument was branded with a 'VFA' mark and a number in order to be able to facilitate control at the South African end; all this took more time than we had bargained for, and after weeks of work, mostly in his spare time, Richard had fifty 'kits' ready to be shipped at the

end of October. The German car manufacturers, Audi, provided cash to pay for the shipping - not just to South Africa, but a number of donors needed to be reimbursed for the cost of mailing instruments to London - and the insurance, and finally the first consignment left for South Africa. Arrangements were made with the local customs authorities to allow the instruments to be cleared; they were then sent to Gallo, the recording distributors in South Africa, for safe storage.

Meanwhile, the South African Music Education Trust (SAMET), under the inspired leadership of Jenifer Williams, set up an Instrument Committee to deal with applications for the loan of the violins. On November 5, at a gala fund-raising dinner in Johannesburg, Lord Menuhin presented the violins to President Mandela, who accepted them on behalf of SAMET. The next consignment of instruments will go out in December.

The enthusiasm for the 'Violins for Africa' project has been extraordinary. It has made me realise just how generous and warm hearted the violin making fraternity is. The high point of this first phase of the project came for me when I attended a workshop for young children from Atteridgeville Township, outside Pretoria, four days after the meeting with President Mandela, organised by SAMET. To see the intensity with which these small people play music, the concentration, the sheer fun of learning to play, the dedication of their teachers,

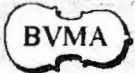
had made the arduous work of finding instruments more than worthwhile for me. It has inspired me to continue with the project, to write more letters, to persuade more people to help.

If any members of the BVMA feel they might be able to donate an instrument (half-size and three-quarter size violins are the most welcome, though obviously there is also a need for full size instruments) then I should be delighted to hear from them. If there is any chance of ensuring that the instruments are in playable condition, then this would help us considerably - it's no use sending an instrument that costs £100 or more to repair, since we don't have those kinds of funds at our disposal. A need which Lord Menuhin identified when we were in South Africa was for 'Dampits' - due to the climate, we should ensure that all instruments come equipped with a set. Does anyone out there have a supply for me? Do write or Fax or call: 9 Southwood Hall, Wood Lane, London N6 5UF, telephone 0181 883 1896, telefax 0181 883 6495. Eleanor Hope

#### **Converting Madder Crystals to smooth paste.**

In issue 3, David Rubio gave a recipe for Madder lake. I have tried it and ended up with the black/red ointment, but it was slightly gritty so I didn't use it on my instrument. I wrote to David but didn't get a reply.

Any ideas on how to get a smooth mix? I note that Christoph Gotting uses Madder, I wonder if he can advise me on this? Ron Wilkinson



#### **A little note from the new world**

New York is known for its many violin shops, big name shops and little known ones. Not too many of these names reach Europe, but stories get around fast. Musicians who travel the globe, often have a hard time producing the optimum sound in every place they play. They need the assistance of a violin shop for tonal adjustments, which can be a difficult matter, on either side of the Atlantic.

New York is known for tight set-ups. (Even shops outside the "Big Apple" try to imitate this fashion). However, there are some problems which may result from this technique. Often, posts get moved outside the tangential line of the bridge foot, which, for sound reasons, may be a possible position for a given instrument. But, if the post gets moved there without being cut down to fit, sometimes it dogs into the top and damage is done. Tight set-ups also usually require more frequent adjustments, hence the room fro "breathing" is taken away.

Some posts are nearly impossible to move after the bridge has been taken off in a tight set-up. (too loose posts fall immediately). One has to hold the violin in one hand between the middle bouts and squeeze it, causing the distance between the top and the back to increase. Then, one must use the soundpost setter to move the post, whereas normally the post would just fall when squeezed.

Instruments which have a patched soundpost crack may suffer under a tight set-up. If you as a

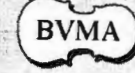
repairer/restorer have ever had a good instrument on your bench, with a tight set-up and an open and patched soundpost crack, accompanied by an unhappy player, second thoughts develop. When the new patch is in place and the instrument is ready for a new post and bridge, you might decide that a different solution is needed to set up that very same violin.

Ute Brinkmann.  
Guilford  
Connecticut.

#### **Climatic Deformation of violins**

I congratulate you on the excellence of the BMVA newsletter and hope that you will continue to receive articles which will be interesting and helpful to all of us.

Regarding Mr. Hill's article on Rene Morel and with reference to that part where the subject of instrument deformation under varying climatic conditions is mentioned. This could be due to the instruments not being protected inside against atmospheric conditions. It seems to me quite illogical to varnish the outside of an instrument yet leave the inside unprotected. I always seal the back and ribs with a thin oil varnish (Windsor & Newton weather resisting varnish is satisfactory - this is the an alkyd resin varnish), and the inside of the table with one coat of a spirit varnish made from sandarac and mastic. I believe that this makes the instrument stable and since it is done prior to regulation in the white, the regulation is preserved.





*Certainly soundposts often need to be changed, with old instruments this may be due to a combination of deformation and alteration in the soundpost length. Another place where trouble occurs is at the saddle where frequently splits are found in the table from the corners of the saddle cavity. I have thought that*

*these may be started by the ebony being too good a fit in the cavity and swelling: for that reason I leave a very small gap at either end of the saddle and insert it to only half the depth of the table.*

*With best wishes  
Dennis Plowright.*

### **Selection of Contemporary Makers for the BVMA Exhibition "400 Years of Violin Making in the British Isles"**

In issue 6 we placed an appeal to the membership for a democratic vote to elect the short list of contemporary makers to represent the "state of the art" in Britain today. To make the vote representative we need a sizeable return and to date the response has been good but we still need more returns. Can you please dig out that voting form and ..... **USE YOUR VOTE!**

#### **Editorial Deadline**

The deadline for the next issue will be August 22nd. Please ensure that all copy is with the Editor by that date. It saves a lot of time if you can supply articles on 3.5" floppy disk and saved as text.

### **X "CREMONA MONDOMUSICA" International Exhibition of Instruments and Accesories.**

The Exhibition, organised by the Ente Triennale Internazionale degli Strumenti ad Arco will this year take place from 24th-26th October 1997.

All handmade musical instruments can be exhibited, either bowed or plucked, wind or keyboard, as long as they are of a high quality.

Further details of exhibition costs and an application form can be had from:  
Ente Triennale Internazionale degli Strumenti ad Arco, Palazzo Fodri,  
17 Corso Matteotti, Cremona. Tel/fax: +39 372-21454

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