

# Newsletter

of the British Violin Making Association

*Acting Editor: John Topham*

## Contents

### **How did they do that?**

John Dilworth talks about Brescian makers ..... Page 3

### **Cleaning Brushes**

Renate Fink gives useful advice ..... Page 7

### **BVMA Maker's Day '97**

Shem Mackey gives a report ..... Page 11

### **Book Reviews**

Two reference books are examined ..... Page 12

### **Exhibition Update**

John Milnes reports on progress ..... Page 14

### **Benslow Trust Exhibitions**

Christoph Götting explains the plan ..... Page 17

### **The Welsh School of Violin Making**

Miranda Green and John Wilkinson talk about the school ..... Page 20

### **Dartington Violin Conference**

Shem Mackey gives a report ..... Page 23

This will be the last issue before the exhibition. To mark this a lot of space in the Newsletter has been devoted to the exhibition's schedule and a progress update with an important request at the end.

Our AGM took place on the 26th November at the Royal Academy. A full report on what was discussed is included.

As you know Shem has stepped down as editor and we are fortunate to have Ann Inglis to replace him. We asked her to

take on the full job and she has agreed to carry out the task for a year for a fee. Details of this are in the AGM report. We believe her experience will be invaluable in maintaining the standard set by Shem and provide a professional base for the BVMA for the future. There were various ideas put forward at the AGM about future projects and policy.

Try to consider them as carefully as you can and forward any of your own ideas that would assist in the process.

**ERRATUM:** Page 27 of Issue 9, Book review: The Violin Explained by Prof. James Beament, reviewed by Alan Seago. Publisher should read 'Oxford University Press'

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## How did they do that?

John Dilworth

I love old Brescian work. You may not. If so, skip this page; you'll only get bored (you too, beloved Chairperson; you'll just get angry). If you are making violas, I think there's no better model to follow, but there are problems with the style. The essence of Brescian work is the vitality and spontaneity, the antithesis of Cremonese neatness. When you look closely at a Brescian, you quickly find short cuts and shortcomings in the craftsmanship, no covering of traces with scraper or abrasives, but just straight knife and gouge work (often blunt), done on the run. Yet for one thing they have survived unsurpassed for 400 years, and for another, they are often covered with apparently intricate and time consuming inlay. Why? The first question I can't answer, but the second I think has to do with the market they were made for, and the attitude to craftsmanship in those days. Why on earth would they spend no more than a couple of days making an instrument, then take what looks as if it must have been another week purfling it? Seventeenth century Tyrolean instruments are just the same; you can hardly see the maple for the latticework of purfling. I believe these old makers set out to make a strong, working instrument as quickly and efficiently as possible, and then garnished it with decorative techniques that to them were as easy and quick to do as slipping off a wet log. For why? For salesmanship! "The plain one is ten pistoles sir, but I think a man of your standing in society might prefer our Deluxe model for a mere 5 pistoles more....."

Several things strike me about these purflings; the designs vary tremendously, for one thing. The Hills show one pattern in their Maggini book, but in truth, I don't think

I have ever seen two instruments that were quite the same. Could they have made new templates each time? I would suggest they used none at all. Each new instrument was done virtually freehand, by an artisan who could inlay hardwoods as easily as sign his own name. Secondly, the work itself, although intricately designed following obvious ruler and compass geometry, is very imprecise. Joints do not meet, filler is plentiful, and spacings and lines vary and wobble considerably. Thirdly, they used two rather stiff and inflexible materials, ebony and spindle wood (rather like box), to execute these tightly radiused spirals and flourishes.

When I make copies of these instruments (and before you awkward customers at the back start muttering, I make copies because I enjoy it and I'm too thick to make my own designs. I'll leave originality to the genius's) I try above all to keep to the spirit of the original, and the first thing is to try and reconstruct the techniques that the original master used, in order to capture some of the flavour of the work. I must say that some of my least favourite instruments in the world are those Vuillaume Maggini copies, with double scrolls and watchspring purfling, about as interesting to the eye as the surface of the M25. There must be a way to cover an instrument in purfling, with style, and make it look as if it was the work of an inspired ten minutes, even if it actually took a little bit longer.

Designing the motifs is the easiest bit; if you don't trace it directly from a photo, a bit of paper and a pair of dividers is all you need anyway. How to transfer it onto the wood? Forget about making up fancy templates - it's too much work. All the Strad paper templates in the Cremona museum are pricked through; the paper pattern was just laid directly onto the wood. Even Leonardo da Vinci did that. The best time to do this is

when the plate has been thumb planed to within a few scrapes of its final surface. I find that it is essential to scrape off the glue soaked surface of the wood after purfling, otherwise my ground doesn't take properly. Then I take a small double bladed knife (which is two scalpel blades set 1mm apart into a wooden handle), and with that I trace over the prickings as swiftly as I dare. Accentuate the lines with a heavier knife- no need to cut more than 1mm deep, or you will have problems thickening the instrument; not that that seems to have affected the longevity of a number of old instruments I've seen where the purfling can be seen on the inside. Use gouges to scribe the smaller radii with a flowing movement. Now comes the longest and hardest bit of the work as far as I'm concerned, digging out the channel with a pick. As long as you're careful to work outward from acute corners, rather than into them and risk losing the points (although even that didn't worry the old boys overmuch), and be careful of the short grain between double purfling, there are no real problems. I find it essential to cut out all the channels before I start the inlaying, rather than working a section at a time, because the lines quickly become obscured or lost under splashes of hot glue in the later stages. If the knife cuts wander slightly, and the channel varies in width, well, congratulations, you're doing it just like Gasparo da Salo (you still won't get five hundred grand for it when it's finished though).

I've now found a source of ebony and box veneer, just as I imagine the old Brescians would have had, and so now I can with great relief give up on my clumsy home-made bandsawn and scraped purflings, which took up too much workshop time (you just can't get the child labour these days). The trick in getting them into the channel is to fit the three strips separately and unglued. It is perfectly obvious from looking at genuine old

Brescians that this is what they did. Wherever the channel is too wide (which is often the case), the black and white strips follow different courses, meandering around the channel like fettucini round a fork. In Cremonese work, if the slot is wider than the purfling, the three strips stay together as they wander across it. It is the white strip which draws the eye on the finished work, and if that is allowed to follow its own course, the natural spring in the wood will produce a flowing line through the curves, almost regardless of the inequalities of the channel. Where the channel runs tight, it is not unusual to see one black strip squeezed out altogether. What you also see on the originals is black filler forced up either side of the purflings, and between the strips as well. So that is what I use. I make up a black paste of hot glue and ebony dust, brush it liberally into the channel, and start feeding the strips in, the three layers held together in the hand, individually glue-sized, but not stuck together previously. This is not only the fastest way I have found to get the purfling done, but it is the only way to get the ebony and boxwood to bend round the tightest curves without cracking, one flaw I don't see in the originals. Pre-glued purfling is far too rigid to permit this. The only other possible approach is to glue the purflings together in purpose made forms beforehand. Too too unutterably boring my dears.

If you follow the under-and-over principle of the original designs, the cutting and fitting is not difficult. Fit the longest length first, as far as the first mitre joint, then lay the next length in, alternately cutting through the first length at the first crossing, and then stopping at the next. You are never left with a tiny fiddly little bit of purfling to wedge in to an awkward space, and the mitres are only tricky if you worry about them. After an hour or so you have black fingers, a black instrument, an incredibly

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messy workbench and an apron that can stand up by itself that a Hells Angel would be proud to own - I love it. The best bit comes another hour or so later, or if you can't wait that long hit it with a hot air blaster (the only thing that Maggini might have been jealous of) and it happens straight away, hacking through the mess (which actually does look a lot like the surface of the M25 at this stage) with your most expendable thumb plane, and revealing the beautiful inlay in all its clear, clean black and white glory. It's chipped, it's wobbly, the customer thinks it's bloody impressive, and it gives me (although I say it myself) much more pleasure than looking at the Vuillaume version.

I know there are people in the world whose idea of heaven is to make templates, moulds and jigs, devices to make devices that will one day make a violin, and prepare gorgeous technical drawings on architects drawing boards. Many of them I call friends (I don't know what they call me..., especially

now). Stradivari may have been of that persuasion, and Vuillaume too. I am not; my main aim in life (apart from ending all human suffering, building a safe and harmonious world for my children to live in and having a quiet evening in front of the television) is to see a player with a smile on their face, and a fiddle that I'm happy with underneath it.

The fact that the old Brescians (and Fusseners) were not frightened of inlaying the middle of the back is one of the many idiosyncracies of Brescian construction that argues for a different working method to the Cremonese. It implies that they purfled with the plates away from the ribs and before they were finally hollowed (the pressure required with the knife is too much to bear onto a graduated back, but that is just one aspect which makes it far too risky to do this sort of work in the Cremonese way of putting the purfling in after the soundbox is closed). The Cremonese were not against extra decoration

on artistic grounds, but Andrea Amati used paint rather than inlay in the centre of the back, and Strad kept all his dots, diamonds and foliage to the edges. It has to be said that loose purfling around the edges, especially in the C bouts, does cause buzzes, but I don't believe purfling in the middle of the back is such a problem (there will probably be a letter from Sir James Beament about this in the next issue). But there is an irony in the fact that despite all the extra purfling, which these days is frowned upon as structurally weak and aesthetically unnecessary, the great Brescians have survived for four hundred years. During the latter part of that time they

have been subjected to all sorts of undignified filletting to bring them down to "approved" modern viola size, which has obscured most of the important clues that tell us how they were made in the first place. They still sound thunderingly good, and as far as I'm concerned, absolutely define "viola sound". I'd say myself that the Brescian method was completely different to the Cemonese, for what it's worth, and even stick my neck out and say that Gasparo da Salo wouldn't have known what a mould was for other than making rabbit shaped jelly. Does it matter? Does anyone care? Does anyone know a good varnish recipe I can borrow?

### THE MILAN SCHOOL IN ENGLAND

From late April to May 1998 the Ruskin Gallery in Sheffield will be exhibiting violins/violas/cellos by Luca Primon, William Goldsmith, Ian Highfield, John Basford, Stefano Gibertoni and Isabella Streicher.

There will also be furniture for musicians (music stands, bow cabinets etc.) by Ian Saville and paintings of musicians by both Martin and Kate Rose.

Further details will be available from the Ruskin Gallery from February 1998 onwards. Tel: 0114 273 5299.

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### Pest Infestation of Valuable Objects

*Prof. James Beament.*

High temperature may kill some pests but so many things in an insect begin to go wrong above about 42.5°C, it would be a brave man who said they die. However, there is as serious a risk in freezing or heating a violin as exposing it to typical fumigants. I was asked to advise when woodworm holes were found in a few of the thousands of old books from the 16th Century onwards in our college library, including many from a don who left us 'such of his books as could not be sold'. They would fetch a small fortune today.

I advised a very simple method. Insects and their eggs can survive for surprisingly long times in low oxygen but

they die if kept in a high concentration of carbon dioxide. Messrs Rentokil produced three huge plastic tents in which we built Dexion frames with plastic nets across them and laid out the books in a single layer, sealed the tents and filled them with carbon dioxide. After three weeks we exhausted the gas out of the window. In a few months we had treated the entire contents of the old library.

I don't know whether Rentokil patented the idea. For my pains, I received a large quantity of the Dexion which has dozens of uses in a workshop. I can see no reason against putting a violin in a thick plastic bag, fill it with carbon dioxide, seal it and leave it for three or four weeks. Alternatively, there is a delightfully naughty way of killing woodworm on page 178 of R et M Millant, *Manuel Pratique de Lutherie* (1952).

### Successfully Cleaning Brushes

*A useful technique from Renate Fink*

In the past I was never very successful in cleaning my varnish brushes (let alone discovering the old master's varnishing secrets!). Until very recently I used to clean my brushes in turpentine or white spirit, afterwards using ordinary soap and warm water, then leaving them to dry. Once dry the brushes were always a bit stiff and the bristles would not separate completely however long I might have spent cleaning them. Although the brush would become soft again once varnishing commenced I was always left with some lumpy deposits in the next coat of varnish. I also tried various commercial brush cleaners with little effect. Good brushes are expensive and I found I was going

through far too many! Somewhat frustrated and slightly embarrassed I went into Fitzpatrick's (see suppliers list) and asked: 'How do you clean a brush?'

I was told to buy some ordinary cooking oil like sunflower oil (of course you can also waste your linseed oil) and to first 'wash' the brush in some oil, to dilute and soften the varnish. I was then advised to buy Marseilles Soapflakes (from Fitzpatrick). At £3.50 per 500g a bargain compared to a new brush. Marseilles soap is an olive soap which retains the natural oil content of the bristle unlike solvents and ordinary soap which strip the brush of its natural properties, thus leaving drying out the bristles.

Back in my workshop, humming 'The Irish Washer Woman' as I set to work, I proceeded as I was advised to:

Place one part of soap flakes into a jar and fill it up with two parts of hot

water. In a second jar place soap and water in the ratio 1:3. Leave the soap to soak for 15 minutes, then stir it. Batch A should have a thick creamy consistency - a sluggish greenish slime, Batch B will be slightly thinner. Have a third jar with hot water ready for rinsing, possibly a forth.

After cleaning the brush in oil and wiping off the excess with tissues work it thoroughly through the soap, obviously avoiding to dishevel the brush. Repeatedly and gently squeeze and stoke the soap out of the brush with your fingers. Unlike solvents this won't irritate the skin. Rinse the brush in warm water and leave to dry completely before

## AGM REPORT

*John Topham*

As you all should know we held our third Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 26th November 1997. 34 people including the management committee and one guest turned up. Topics covered ranged from the Benslow Trust buying a whole load of new instruments, a new editor for the Newsletter to higher subs!

Marc Soubeyran, chairman, opened the proceedings with a brief report mainly thanking people for their efforts throughout the last year. Florian Leonhard, treasurer, added to the summary of accounts posted to everyone before the meeting a brief account of our present financial position. We have at present £14,651 in our Nat. West. account. He stressed that £10,000 of this had come from sponsors of the forthcoming 400 years exhibition. The BVMA had £4,651 at its immediate disposal. In the Woolwich Building Society account we had £6,269 as well. A sum total of £10,920. There were some bills forthcoming such as mine for postage and stationary which I will submit in

using again. The soap solution can be reused several times. Since warm soapy water cleans much more effectively I simply place the jars in a pot and warm the soap by double boiling it on my hot plate.

Since using this process all my brushes are as they should be: clean and ready to apply even coats of varnish. The advantages of the soap are that the solutions can be used several times, the bristles will separate completely and won't become dry and brittle. There is no harm to the skin, no fumes of solvents and for those who care: soap is much more environmentally friendly than solvents.

the January committee meeting not to mention a few others.

I chipped in with a brief report on membership matters. There are at present 280 paid members and 14 honorary members making 294 in all. Hopefully soon we'll pass the 300 mark!

Elections took place and all but one of the members including officers were re-elected. John Milnes wished to step down and Paul Bowers, maker of instruments in Newark was elected in his place.

Shem Mackey, our outgoing editor, briefly gave an account of the last year's efforts and thanked everyone concerned. Marc proposed a vote of thanks which ended in a round of applause for Shem. A stirring job well done! Marc introduced Ann Inglis, former editor of the Strad, present editor of the ESTA in-house magazine, who is keen on the taking on the job of editing the Newsletter. She outlined her ideas and quoted a fee of £800 per issue plus cost of production of £600 plus upwards of £80 as extras again per issue. All felt she would be right for the job and that her fee was reasonable and elected her as editor. She will attend January's committee meeting and sort

things out from then on.

Marc reported that the '97 Dartington Conference was better attended this time with 150 people compared with around 130 in 1996. More instruments were also on show. He went on to provide the five names chosen for next year's conference. They are Sylvette Milliot and Bernard Milliant, talking about aspects of Vuillaume on the 200th anniversary of his birth, Nick Baldock talking about the manufacture and other aspects of strings, Paul Robertson, first violin of the Albeni Quartet and Wilf Saunders on the practical aspects of making. The Cat Quartet will not be able to attend the next conference, so any ideas on Quartets will be welcome.

At the time of writing assurances were given that the '96 transcripts would be ready by the end of the year. Let's hope!

John Milnes gave a full report on the organisation of the Exhibition of 400 years of violin making in the British Isles. Because this is pretty well the last chance to explain about the event before it happens, his report is

printed in full elsewhere in this Newsletter. Please take note of his appeal at the end of his piece.

Shem also reported on the 'Maker's Day' held on Sunday 19th October 1997. He thank the people involved for all their hard work. From the comments he had received he felt that most people thought the event worthwhile despite what he described as a rather disappointing public attendance. However, this might have been because of the unfamiliarity of the event held for the first time. This will obviously improve as more events are held. The organising group were willing to continue the stirring task next year.

This smoothly linked on to the next topic concerning the Benslow Trust's Instrument Loan Scheme and their attempt to improve it. They want to buy upwards of 30 instruments a year for the next few years with the help of Lottery money. Not everything is completely worked out but the plan involves holding exhibitions and that is where we come in. They have booked the hall in the Royal

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College of Music in London for the 23rd May 1998. Christoph Götting, who has liaised with the Trust is co-ordinating our co-operation. He wants to form a small group to help them work out details such as how to assess the instruments in such a short period of time if that is possible. The group would not be involved in actually recommending what instruments the Trust will buy. That will be their decision. The group will act as technical advisors assisting the Trust to buy instruments that basically work and leave details such as tone and style to the Trust's discretion. Shem Mackey and Hector Lidgate said they would be interested in joining the group. Anyone who feels they can contribute by attending meetings and the 'exhibition' should feel free to contact Christoph whose number is in the List of Members.

People thought that because these exhibitions will allow any maker to attend, not just BVMA members, our own 'Maker's Day' should still continue once a year in the Autumn. It might not be called 'Maker's Day' in the future since some people were apparently misled by the title and thought it was for makers only!

Judith Blackwell then outlined a plan to set up a Trust as a memorial to Rowan Amour-Brown who died last year. She was very keen on helping students as a teacher and Judith and others felt this trust would be a fitting gesture to her memory. Judith suggested money be raised to provide awards to deserving current or newly graduated students in the form of either a scholarship or a grant, which would be either cash, wood or tools. She said that a trust committee had been agreed which included herself, Paul Bowers, Juliet Barker, Geraldine Grandidier, Dr Peter Love and Wilf Saunders as chairman. Further details needed to be worked out but members at the AGM

approved the idea and agreed for the 'wheels be set in motion'. If anyone is interested further about the Trust they can get in touch with Judith.

At the end of the meeting from a suggestion from Paul Jefferies, Marc said we should think about a plan to acquire permanent premises for the exclusive use of the BVMA. Others had suggested how we could raise the BVMA's profile. Marc reckoned this would be a good way to display what we could offer. The premises could be used to show instruments to prospective customers. It could house an archive and a possible dedicated library as well as other services. If the premises were big enough they could be used as a convenient meeting place particularly for committees and other gatherings. He urged we consider the idea seriously and come forward with any suggestions in due course. (see letters)

Marc also suggested we review the level of subscriptions. We were beginning to take on commitments which increasingly needed extra funds and an increase in the subs was considered. After some discussion about being fair to members with fixed income but at the same time being realistic about raising them to an appropriate level, it was decided to raise the subs to £25 from the 1st June 1998 onwards.

Finally, Marc suggested that the issue of violin making education be addressed. He added that it was in the interests of all makers, amateur and professional, to raise the standard of education as high as possible. He asked if people could think of ways to create a working party to address other BVMA members, all violin-making schools, the Departments of Education and Trade and Industry. He urged members to offer ideas and consider it for the future.



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## BVMA Makers Day 1997

*Shem Mackey*

Marketing strategy, sales figures, are terms not commonly associated with the violin making trade. Ask any maker to describe his selling method and the majority will say that they do not have one. "Have a play on that and see how you like it" just about sums it up and as a sales technique, it does work. The hands on approach to selling is usually the most successful until such time as a reputation is earned; but even then fame can be a fickle friend. Some sell through dealers, the lucky ones you might say; not bothered with all the effort of 'foot in the door' salesman techniques, able to concentrate on the enjoyable part, the making. Others would argue that contact with the player is a rewarding aspect which should not be diminished by the use of an intermediary

and any maker who has heard a satisfied customer playing happily on his newly made violin will no doubt agree.

Selling violins is not easy but it can be pleasant. The BVMA makers day in the concert hall at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, on 19th October succeeded in making the business of selling a little more pleasant. Forty makers of violins, violas, cellos, viols and electric violins set out their stalls from ten in the morning until four in the afternoon. Attendance was slow but steady and in total there was approx. 250 visitors throughout the day. The venue, was ideal and many of the students availed of the chance to see and play on the instruments. Practise rooms were provided if someone wished to try out an instrument and, surprisingly, the noise level never became a problem, a factor which tends to mar the enjoyment of other musical instrument exhibitions. Dealers did attend

and in particular one gentleman who flew in from Texas that morning to include the Guildhall on his itinerary.

On the downside, there was nowhere to partake of refreshments and the trek to the Barbican centre seemed a little far, it would be a bonus to have the coffee bar open for next years day.

Many people attending, especially makers and enthusiasts, seemed to be of the impression that the day was a day for 'makers' as implied by the title of the event; a change of nomenclature for the next 'makers' day would seem a necessity.

But this was the first attempt at such a day in London and the positive response to the day, from both exhibitor and punter, bodes well for future maker days. The permanence of a fixture of this sort on the calendar is essential to its success and it can only grow in stature as the players and dealers realise the quality there is to see and in what quantity!

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Histoire de la Lutherie Parisienne du XVIIIe Siècle à 1960 Tome II: Les Luthiers du XVIIIe Siècle**

Sylvette Milliot  
ISBN 2-930130-01-6 385pp FF1000/£97  
Les Amis de la Musique, Avenue Reine  
Astrid 73,  
B-4900 Spa, Belgium.

*(This review first appeared in the  
November 1997 issue of the Strad  
magazine.)*

What should we expect from a book on violins? It should be accurate, with a well-researched, carefully analysed and thorough history of that maker or school. Secondly, it should offer an overview of those times and that environment, showing us how the makers fit into their social, political, artistic and economic fabric. It should also provide a clear and informed analysis of what makes these instruments important, and, lastly, it should contain lots of photographs of good, characteristic and authentic works by the makers in question.

All this can be found in the latest offering from the French instrument historian Sylvette Milliot. Her new book *Les Luthiers du XVIIIe Siècle*, volume two of her projected four volume series on Parisian violin making, gives a thorough account of the pre-Revolution violin makers of Paris. She gives a clear delineation of various currents in French Lutherie of that era which clarifies the nature and importance of that school.

The book begins with a fine presentation on the Guild structure, the education and the professional and personal lives of the 18th-century Parisian masters. This is followed by an in-depth historical study of each important master and his professional orbit in a way that makes each one come to life. The next section describes the different instruments created by these luthiers, especially illuminating with regard to those instruments which are today treasured more as ornaments than as instruments as well as an interesting discussion of strings and varnish - something often forgotten in other works - all of which is drawn from contemporary sources.

Virtually every maker in the book is represented by a wide variety of

photographs of fine authentic instruments. The photos are obviously from many different sources and in many different formats but all are reproduced in good detail and fairly accurate colour, while the indexes include transcriptions of all the important acts discovered in the course of Milliot's research for those who wish to delve deeper into the subject.

It seems somehow petty to find much fault with this work, and if I have any complaint, it has to do with the fine, tight binding into which some of the data on the extremely useful tables disappears. Less of a criticism is the acknowledgement that the book is in well-written and wonderfully detailed French, with an English translation that is but a summary. The reader is advised to brush up on that long-forgotten school-time French, as reading the French text adds many dimensions to the entire experience.

This book should be strongly recommended to any serious student of fine violins who wants to know what a scholarly publication on violins ought to be.

Philip J. Kass

### **Dictionary of British Violin and Bow Makers**

Denis Plowright.  
Hardback. 187 pages. A5 (210 × 148)  
price £19.50. Published by the author.

A revised and enlarged second edition, containing well over 1800 entries on makers from the early 17th century to the present day. Entries range from the disappointingly short "contemporary" or

"amateur", to around half a page on the more important makers. Average entries are around 6-10 lines long, and all entries have a heading giving name, key dates and location. There are no illustrations or facsimile labels.

This is a useful little book. The author - a respected contemporary violin maker - has taken a fresh look at the work of British violin and bow makers, and given us an up to date reassessment covering all key essentials in a clear,

concise and readable manner. He leaves out much of the purely biographical background covered by earlier Dictionaries, sometimes at great length, and concentrates more on the actual work of makers. Thus we are given welcome details of their output, including characteristics of the instruments, models used, type of varnish, tone, number of instrument made and wording of labels etc. After a lifetime in the trade, the author has obviously seen examples of the work of many of the makers listed, and the opinions, given from a makers point of view, are the more worthwhile for that.

This Dictionary also gives a general overview of many of our younger contemporary makers, particularly those who have come out of the violin making schools such as Newark and the former Welsh school in recent years. Some of these are beginning to develop high reputations, and are likely to be amongst the most sought after makers of the future. Details of their work, and where they trained are given.

Earlier makers such as Peter Walmesley, Benjamin Banks, the Forsters and the Hills are not forgotten, and details and opinions on their work are also included. Whilst acknowledging the high quality

work of many British violin makers, the author also identifies those makers whose work may be less than satisfactory. Comments such as "details eccentric", "rather heavy in conception" and "some features exaggerated" show one reason why British violin making as a whole is perhaps not as highly valued as it might be. The varnish too, in the worst cases, seems to have "crazed badly", or is "very opaque" or "rather chippy". These are certainly aspects to look out for when buying an instrument, and this book is of help here.

Inevitably in a work of this kind there are a few omissions, and occasional errors. No doubt some readers will know of a maker who is not listed. I would have liked to see Gil Soloman and Jan Kudanowski mentioned for instance; and Adam Paul has been credited with being twenty years older than he really is! Nonetheless, this is surely the most comprehensive record of British violin and bow makers ever published. It is well worth a place on the shelf of everyone interested in, or wishing to know more, about these makers and their work. Recommended

Christopher Wilson

## EXHIBITION UPDATE

### Current planning on 1998 Exhibiton "400 Years of Violin Making in the British Isles"

*This report was read out by John Milnes, exhibition committee member, at the AGM.*

It's coming! The exhibition "400 Years of Violin Making in the British Isles" in the Duke's Hall of the Royal

Academy of Music for the fortnight before Easter next year. Just four months away, a thought that will scare the committee members who know how much there is yet to do. Book the dates in your diary: Tuesday 31st March to Easter Saturday 11th April 1998. Nine members of the BVMA have met monthly for the past year and a half as the exhibition committee. The current state of planning is as

follows;

**1. Finances.** We have a total expected income of £74,000 made up of sponsorship and projected earnings from the exhibition itself. The estimated total costs are £79,200. The gap will be bridged by either reducing our costs, or (more likely) additional sponsorship. Major sponsors and supporters of the exhibition are Charles Beare, Peter Biddulph and Dr. Curtis Price of the Royal Academy of Music.

**2. The Instruments and Bows.** The show is intended to celebrate the best instruments made in this country starting in the 1600s and ending with the contemporary scene. So it begins with viols by Richard Meares and Henry Jaye; then runs through the centuries with the best examples from (among others) Norman, Parker, Duke, Walmsley, Forster, Banks, Panormo, Chanot, Hill and Luff. A total of 90 viols violins, violas, cellos and basses. The best of bows will run through a similar list of the great makers down to the present. Ten makers of violins and ten of bows have been nominated by ballot of BVMA members. They have been invited in writing to participate but until their replies are received the committee felt it is premature to announce the names at present.

**3. The Exhibition.** Some idea of what the exhibition will be like is as follows:-

Visitors will start in the Henry Wood room where tickets and a guide will be on sale; then come through into the Duke's Hall where 35 or so glass cases will be specially lit. Around and in the cases will be display boards explaining who's who; how and where the craft developed. In with the instruments and bows will be portraits of makers; copies of labels and business cards; maps and prints.

**4. Exhibition Guide.** A forty-eight page guide with colour photos of selected items; details of all exhibition items etc., is being produced by Orpheus Publications (publishers of the Strad).

**5. The Catalogue.** Having all these items together in one place has given a marvellous opportunity to study and photograph them. Clarissa Bruce who does specialist instrument photography has been engaged to photograph all the items. These together with full details will go into the definitive catalogue of the exhibition. It may take two or more years to do this thoroughly but it will become a substantial and authoritative work on British making.

**6. Concerts and Symposium.** Five quartets and string ensembles will give evening concerts during the exhibition fortnight starting with the Baker collection (17th century quartet of instruments) "Fiddell's of Purcell's England"; followed by the Salomon quartet with an 18th century repertoire; "Fretwork" with a concert of viol music; the Albeni Quartet on 19th century music and the Kreutzer Quartet on 20th century music. Most will be in the small concert hall in the Academy and the exhibition will stay open on concert evenings. The middle Saturday, 4th April, we will have a symposium: Philip Kass will speak on English bow making; Peter Holman on the early period of violins; John Topham on what we have learned about British work through dendrochronology and Brenda Neece on the English cello.

**7. Finally, Help!** This is an ambitious exhibition. £79,000 is a very modest budget. We have struggled as a committee to keep costs down and still put on a classy show. We can't afford an army of stewards to run the show. So this is an appeal to all members of the BVMA



to volunteer! We are open for twelve days. We have five concerts and a symposium. Can you spare a day or two to come help run the show. In exchange for free access to the exhibition you would be helping to sell tickets, keep an eye on the exhibits and generally look after the public. Judith Blackwell is compiling a

list. Please get in contact with her on 0171 580 2560 during the day or 0181 341 7669 in the evening or weekends. Please add your name to the list to offer what you can. We will be giving full instructions on what the job involves nearer the time. Thank you.

## EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

The exhibition committee have published a schedule of events that will take place during the exhibition of violin-making of the last four hundred years in the British Isles. The exhibition will open Tuesday 31st March and close 11th April 1998.

The schedule is as follows:

### MARCH

#### Tuesday 31st

Sir Jack Lyons Theatre 7.30pm.  
Fiddell's of Purcell's England  
The Baker Collection  
Diane Terry, Brian Lloyd Wilson *violins*  
Oliver Webber *violin and viola*,  
Laurie Ann MacLeod *bass violins*

This challenging and thought-provoking recital by The Baker Collection will give a fresh aural perspective on seventeenth-century music. The results of recent research will be heard for the first time in London; in a programme including music by Purcell, Locke, Lawes, Baltzar, Paisible and Finger.

### APRIL

#### Wednesday 1st

Sir Jack Lyons Theatre 7.30pm.  
Salomon Quartet Concert

Simon Standage, Micela Comberti *violins*  
Trevor Jones *viola*, Jennifer Ward-Clarke *cello*  
Cipriani Potter: String Quartet  
Sir Henry Rowley-Bishop: String Quartet

Cipriani Potter was Professor of Piano at the Royal Academy of Music from 1822, Principal from 1832-59, and gave first London performances of several Mozart and Beethoven Piano Concertos.

#### Friday 3rd

St Marylebone Parish Church 7.30pm  
Concert of Viol Music  
Fretwork  
Richard Campbell, William Hunt, Julia Hodgeson, Susanna Pell, Richard Boothby

The programme will include Fantasias and In Nomines, Madrigals apt for Viols by Byrd, Purcell, Gibbons, Jenkins, Lupo and Locke, as well as new music by Barry Guy, Paul Sculthorpe, Poul Ruders.

#### Saturday 4th

Sir Jack Lyons Theatre 10.00am-5pm.  
Seminar on British Violin Makers.  
Guest speakers will include Peter Holman, Phil Kass, John Topham, and Brenda Neece.

### Wednesday 8th

Sir Jack Lyons Theatre 7.30pm.  
Albemi String Quartet concert  
Howard Davis, Peter Pople *violins*  
Matthew Souter *viola*, David Smith *cello*

Programme to include works by Stanford, McEwen, Elgar and Bridge

### Friday 10th

Sir Jack Lyons Theatre 7.30pm.  
Kreutzer String Quartet Concert  
Peter Sheppard, Bridget Carey *violins*  
Gordon Mackay *viola*, Neil Heyde *cello*

Tippett: Quartet No.2 in F sharp  
Finnissy: Multiple Forms of Constraint (world premiere)  
Diana Burrell: Gulls and Angels  
Haflidi Hallgrímsson: 7 Spigrams  
Judith Weir: String Quartet

### Admission Charges:

Exhibition  
£5 - day ticket (£3 concessions)  
£10 - unlimited access

Concerts\*  
£10 per concert (£7.50 concessions)  
£40 - all five concerts  
\* these tickets include access to the exhibition

Seminar  
£50

Admission by ticket only (see above charges) - please apply <sup>†</sup> to the Box Office, Royal Academy of Music, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5HT. Please make cheques payable to British Violin Making Exhibition and enclose a S.A.E.; tel: 0171 873 7300

<sup>†</sup> Tickets will be available from the beginning of January 1998.

## BENSLOW TRUST MUSICAL INSTRUMENT LOAN SCHEME EXHIBITIONS

*A note from Christoph Gotting, the BVMA's co-ordinator with the Benslow Trust.*

**Have you heard of the Benslow Trust and its Musical Instrument Loan Scheme?**

The Benslow Trust is an established charity that not only runs the administration of the Loan Scheme but also devises and runs a programme of practical residential courses tutored by eminent musicians. The courses take place at Little Benslow Hills, an attractive Victorian House and grounds with a capacity of up to 50 persons in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. It also lets the accom-

modation and facilities for courses and activities to be run by others. Benslow has a good concert hall, practice rooms, a full range of keyboard instruments and an extensive music library.

The Musical Instrument Loan Scheme has during the past 60 years given hundreds of young people the chance to make music. The Scheme exists to provide good instruments - mainly strings - on loan to promising young students so that talent is not held back by the lack of a suitable instrument.

Recently - and this is where it gets

interesting - the Trust has made a lottery money application with which it aims to double its existing number of presently 325 instruments within a time span of six years. In other words the Trust is aiming to buy about 25-30 new instruments and bows annually from a selection presented by British instrument makers. Any maker, including non-BVMA members can offer instruments and bows for sale at specially arranged exhibitions. The first of such

exhibitions will take place **even if lottery money is not forthcoming** on Sunday 24th May 1998 at the Royal College of Music in London. An other event of this kind will most likely be held in the autumn of that year in Manchester. Details of these exhibitions are not yet available.

I will keep you posted.

# Leonard Labram

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### REPORT ON THE TRIENNALE IN CREMONA

by Christoph Götting

As one of the members of the jury at this year's Triennale competition in Cremona I was asked to write something on my impressions.

My colleges at this task for the craft were J B Morassi of Cremona, Ramon Pinto from Madrid, Serge Stam from Utrecht and Hieronymus Köstler from Stuttgart. Most of the judges for sound were from Vienna, an extremely musical and talented young Quartet, the "Hugo Wolf". A double bass player, G Ettore came from Italy. Our president was the fascinating multi-

lingual and surprisingly energetic - for his advanced years - composer Professor Roman Vlad from Rome. Paolo Rossini and his assistant Claudio Amighetti had to work hard to keep the jury tied to the rules!

On Sunday 21st of September a photograph taken at the wonderfully preserved 15th century Palazzo Fodri, where the headquarters of the Triennale is based, showed the jury in all splendour. But if one looked carefully one could see a short-sleeved and -trousered tourist hiding in the back - how was I to know that smart dress had been expected for this first get-together.... On this day we listened to a number of speeches most of us didn't understand and were then asked to read the rules of the competition and to sign them. There were obviously some discrepancies between the English and the Italian version but at this point we had no objections to doing so. Seeing two rooms filled with instruments the next day made us realise that we had our work cut out for one week. First we had to agree with the disqualification (so far by the secretary) of some instruments that had covered up labels or marks or numbers. Eagle eyed Hieronymus and Serge soon found some more too. Future entrants be warned! Then we had to disqualify some instruments that were simply not good enough to take part at all. Now the fun started..... Detailed marks had to be given for several different categories like craftsmanship, design, set-up and varnish. The musicians did their marking in another room, thank goodness. Frequently we heard them shouting "Hugo"-- get it?

How does one differentiate between instruments that look so similar? A huge number of them seemed to have exactly the same clear but tough varnish of orangey hue. One could not have left a fingerprint on most of them if one had tried. Classic Italian

varnish **was and still is** tender in comparison. Much of the woodwork was similar too with edge work, corners, f-holes, archings and scrolls nearly identical. Set up's were mostly of poor quality. Since roughly a hundred out of two hundred and forty instruments came from Italy, it seems clear that a distinct style is emerging here that does not wish to take much of its inspiration from the past. That aside there were some welcome exceptions. So we had to give quite high marks for good design and set up, but it wasn't easy. What dawned on us only very near the end was that the sequence of our and the musicians first markings had to be carried through right to the end (and this across all the different instrument categories). The only way of influencing or changing the first round's top marks in a small way was via the final "blind" sound test. This is clearly inadequate. In the second round every instrument should be equal so that a new line-up is possible. It is a pity if an instrument that had highish marks in the first round can't be put further back when it emerges later that other ones should overtake it. Deciding through a point system can be difficult even unjust if no flexibility is allowed. We will be writing to the Triennale office with our suggestions but it is doubtful whether a new committee in three years time will have even looked at our letter.

Nevertheless a good time was had in Cremona with lots of good food, hospitality and company (a new dish for me was raw horse meat with truffles... well, one tries some things once). Both Paolo and Claudio were great fun and worked very hard. Our president managed to hold it all together sometimes it seemed against all odds.

I would not like to forget to congratulate Christopher Rowe for his gold medal viola. It is a smart looking instrument with interesting varnish and a good tone and set-up.

## THE WELSH SCHOOL OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MAKING AND REPAIR

*Continuing with the theme of present and past violin making schools in this country, Miranda Green and John Wilkingson describe their experiences at the Welsh School. Miranda Green was in charge of the School in Abertridwr between 1977 and 1989. She recounts a personal history of it and in particular the violin making course.*

The idea of developing a Welsh School of Musical Instrument Making and Repair in the 1970s came from W. Aylwyn Jones, who was then Director of Education for Mid Glamorgan and an enthusiast of the violin. He was keen to see the improvement of school musical instruments in Wales and the training particularly of Welsh musical instrument technicians. It was hoped that the School would become an institution funded by all the Welsh education authorities, but in the event only Mid Glamorgan was prepared to support the initiative.

"The Welsh School" was opened in September 1976. As far as I am aware its original aim was to train students in all aspects of musical instrument making and repair, including stringed instruments, wind instruments, pianos and harps. The courses were to be of two years duration.

In 1977 I applied for a post as lecturer at the school, which was an annexe of Ystrad Myach College of Further Education. I remember asking Charles Beare if he knew anything about the college and his reply was, "Unfortunately I know nothing of Ystrad Mynach, except that the first word sounds quite promising and the second one rather foreign." This did not fill me with confidence but I was offered the post and arrived to start teaching at the School in April 1977. The only other member of the teaching staff was Michael Goater, who was in charge at the time and specialised in viol making.

During my first week the School moved from its initial temporary accommodation to an old Victorian primary school built of stone and situated half way up a mountain in the village of Abertridwr, in the South Wales Valleys. This was some six miles distant

from the College of F.E. and twelve miles north of Cardiff. My first impressions were of joy at the size of the windows, allowing plenty of light, but considerable doubt about the dampness and the very basic quality of the facilities.

With only two members of staff and about ten students, whose ambitions included making guitars of various types, repairing and tuning pianos, and learning to make and repair brass instruments as well as stringed instruments, I felt that the overall aim of the school was rather ambitious. I proposed that those students who wanted to make good use of their time should learn from the specialisms of the staff available to them and so the course in violin making and repair came into being, and the first workshop was set up. This is largely based on my experiences gained whilst studying at the Newark School. This gave me a course framework but I was also able to incorporate anything that I thought might help to improve the course from the students' point of view.

The School developed further to include a successful Piano Tuning and Repair course run initially by George Wood and Richard Kühnel (who had both trained at Newark), and joined later by Graham Hurley. There were also efforts to develop a Harp Making and Repair course run by Alan Shiers, a well-known harp maker from Wales, who trained with John Thomas and was sponsored to make a concert harp for Mid Glamorgan County Council. The course ran for a while with a trial student but ran into difficulties over the length of the course, the experience and expertise required of prospective students, and financial resources.

To return to the Violin Making and Re-

pair course, at the beginning of the second academic year Michael Goater left the college and I found myself in charge of the school. We quickly recruited Terry McCool on to the violin making staff. At that stage the authorities planned a two year course, but this was in my opinion unrealistic and so a great deal of effort went in to increase the overall length of the course to three years, to increase the weekly hours from 30 to 35, and to increase the number of workshops accordingly. After much persuasion we got our way and this meant appointing a further member of staff, which was when Malcolm Siddall joined the team. We managed to maintain a student intake of seven students a year with a truly international mix. We also ran evening classes for local amateur violin makers many of whom became very proficient in the craft. In all our endeavours we relied on the continued support and enthusiasm of Aylwyn Jones who regularly paid informal visits to the School and encouraged our progress against all odds.

The course was structured so that students completed as many violins as they could in the first year, but the main emphasis was always on quality rather than quantity. The second year was devoted to repairing methods and techniques, fitting up, and bow maintenance. During the third year of study the students consolidated the techniques learnt in the first two years, making more instruments and working on a project of their own choice: researching a particular instrument themselves and then making it in the workshop. The final piece of work for external assessment by Charles Beare and Wilfred Saunders was a violin completed in the white, reflecting the style of a Stradivari violin.

During the course the students were encouraged to visit museums and collections in order to have the opportunity of seeing quality instruments, and regular visits were made to the London auction sales and, in later years, the Paris Conservatoire. Some students also participated in the Greenwich Festival violin making competition when it was in operation and were successful in gaining

prizes.

The first ten years went relatively smoothly, the main struggles being over the lack of resources. However we managed to supplement the staff with part-time visiting violin maker on a weekly basis and other one-off visits by experts in the field. There are too many to mention all their names but I thank them all for their efforts and for travelling many miles to help us out in the remote village.

Aylwyn Jones retired from his post in the mid 1980s but continued as far as he could to support the School. However the climate of educational cuts was ever present and the pressure increased to cut resources, cut student hours, cut staff and increase the number of students recruited to the course. All the staff were concerned that instead of continuing to improve the courses things were going to take a backward step. Although the students managed to use the workshop facilities as often as they could they found it more difficult to get the help of the staff when they needed it because the number of teaching hours had been cut.

The frustration of seeing the courses we had created being slowly eroded, and my feeling that if the school was to continue it needed some fresh ideas and enthusiasm, brought me to consider my position at the School. I also had serious misgivings about all the schools collectively training more violin makers and repairers than the trade could sustain. It was at that point that I decided to leave at the end of 1989. After discussions with the remaining staff, the authorities decided that they were not sufficiently committed to the School to give it the full support that was needed and decided to run down the courses. No more students were recruited and gradually the existing students and staff left as their courses were completed. The School finally closed down in July 1991.

In many respects I was sorry to see the closure. Had the School started out supported by all the Welsh authorities it probably would have survived. On the other hand I am pleased for the students who took part in the courses and the staff who put in so much

effort that the reputation and standard of the School remained as it was and did not suffer a slow demise as would have happened without

a real commitment of support from the authorities.

*John Wilkinson who attended the school as a student from 1984 to 1987 reflects on his time there.*

The school was set in a Welsh Valley above Caerphilly - in a Victorian primary school in Aberridwr which leads on up to Sengenydd. It is the sort of place where, if you cannot see the mountains it is raining, and if you can it is just about to.

The site was shared with a piano restoration and tuning course and a harp-maker. The violin-making course lasted three years: the first year beginning to learn how to make and the second year learning repairing techniques. The third year started with a project - making anything but a violin. This ranged from a Hardanger fiddle to violas, cellos, harps, viols, and even a hurdy-gurdy. More practice in violin-making followed, and at the end of the year we had to make a violin in six weeks, which was examined by Charles Beare and Wilf Saunders.

Each year group had seven students, two of whom were British and the rest German, French, Scandinavian, Dutch, Belgian and so on. The first year was largely taken up with wood, sharpening tools, design and re-arranging Ute's workbench. It was supervised by Malcolm Siddel whose enthusiasm had us working towards a first violin by Christmas - this from a group which ranged from students who had never done any making at all to some who had done a small amount before starting the course.

The violins which predominated were Strads, only because they are the most perfect and beautifully excuted violins, and the least eccentric - well, one has to start somewhere.

Anyway, the test was to make a violin in the style of Stradivarius.

The week was concerned with as much making as possible. The hours were 9am. - 9pm., if you wanted to use them all. One morning a week was a technical drawing session, looking at the design of violins and at any project on the go. Every second week this led on to the metal bashing session that went on in the metal workshop, making everything from closing cramps, purfling picks and bending irons to flattening planes.

The second year was spent repairing - going through a series of tasks that were there to be got through, straightforward to very complicated. Resistance at times was quite high, but with a fair amount of pressure and encouragement from Miranda we got through it. The tasks went from crack-cleaning to putting bass-bars into double-basses.

The third year was supervised by Terry McCool. The project mentioned above was set up in the previous year with designs, jointing wood, templates, moulds etc. This helped to give us a running start, so that the project would be finished in a reasonable time. Around then we also spent time getting the wood, design and templates together for the test instrument. In between the project and the test we made two or more other instruments, to try to finalise plans.

Throughout all this there were many other ideas going back and forth through all three years, in an atmosphere of hard work and energy which was often commented on by visitors to the school. And of course throughout this time there was also much talk about and attempts at varnish-making - but that is another story.

## Dartington Violin Conference 1997

*Shem Mackey*

It was in 1925, shortly after their marriage, that Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst (a Whitney Heiress) purchased the Dartington Hall Estate and began the transformation and rebuilding of the mediaeval ruins and property. In the intervening years the development of the school and the embracing of modernist architecture has turned this corner of Devon into a special place where progressive education and 'alternative' living have become the accepted norm.

It was again on Dartington that 150 violin makers and enthusiasts descended on the penultimate weekend of September to partake in the annual Dartington Hall Violin Conference. Celebrating its third year at this location the conference has settled well into its new home and the feeling of permanence generated by the place has done no little amount of good to the stature of the conference on the annual calendar of violin making events. Such events always run the risk of being too formal in nature, disappearing under a weight of superfluity; this I hasten to add will never befall the Dartington conference. The weekend produced a heady mix of enlightening talks and late night social exchange which did much to recharge the violin making batteries of all those too long removed from their peers throughout the intervening months. Dartington has become a necessity!

As usual the weekend opened on Friday night with dinner followed by a welcome and introduction from Helen Challoner of the Dartington Hall Trust and Marc Soubeyran, chairman of the BVMA.

Jean-Louis Despiau, a violin bridge maker from the south west of France provided the opening on Saturday morning

with a humorous but informed discourse on the function, operation and tonal adjustment of the bridge. Using analogies from fluid dynamics he set about explaining the importance of retaining mass and shape in the main part of the bridge while making initial adjustments to the feet only. The feet he likened to the water tap on a large barrel of water, (to control the flow of vibration through to the front) and stressed the link between rate of flow and pressure.

His study of baroque bridges, the differing shapes and their development led him to conclusions regarding the ideal shape for the bridge arch and the stages of cutting a bridge. One of the more interesting points to emerge was his questioning of the desire of modern makers to always cut a symmetrical bridge. Logically, he argued, the asymmetrical physical construction and stringing of the instrument suggests that asymmetrical cutting in carefully worked out stages would give optimum results. He took areas of the bridge and explained the effect of cutting on the resultant acoustic and described a series of stages that cutting should involve.

Mr. Despiau has been researching and making bridges for over 12 years and together with his production of 'regular' shaped bridges, he produces his own models based on his extensive studies. Using slides he showed how the resultant bridge is reminiscent of 18c. bridges with heavy feet and a very round baroque arch. In question time when asked about the effects of sealing bridges, Mr. Despiau replied that it causes surface hardening which will again change the dynamic of the bridge but he did concede that it also removes the unpredictability of the instrument by preventing response to humidity changes.

The timetable of speakers was disturbed due to travel problems encountered by Paul Childs so the next speaker unexpectedly thrust into the limelight was Karel Moens, scientific adviser to the Brussels Conservatoire museum of musical instruments. He spoke on 'Problems of authenticity with bowed instruments of the 16th. century.

Karel Moens has in the past courted controversy with what can best be described as his scholarly distrust of the 'acquired' provenances of some instruments. This distrust has been mistaken by many to be an arrogant dismissal of these instruments and their weighty heritage. His talk set out to show his reasons for this distrust and through a series of slides he shot from the hip, in quick succession going through instruments from collections all over the world by makers well known to us all. He succeeded well in putting his point across though one or two factual errors undermined some of what had been previously well argued.

In the late nineteenth century, the development of a fashion for collecting old instruments led to a demand which quickly outstripped the available authentic supply. Mr. Moens suggests that a lot of today's 'originals' were, in fact, created by unscrupulous makers reworking old violones, basses etc. to provide for this demand.

Throughout his researches Moens has only considered instruments which are regarded as genuine by the experts. His main worry is the apparently huge gap in reliable information which exists with regard to some of these instruments and the spurious origins attributed to them. He referred to the lack of iconographic evidence to support the existence of many instruments and in other cases the

iconographic evidence was evidently out of sync with the supposed instrument labelled dates.

Subsequent changes to the outline of instruments and/or reworking of f-holes or other features has, he argued, rendered them unreliable as evidence of 16th century workmanship. He was not setting out to rubbish instruments by saying they were fakes but that quite possibly a great deal of genuine originals have been rendered unreliable as 16th century examples because of intermediate work carried out on them, whether for unscrupulous ends or to update instruments to a 'contemporary' playing style and that we as makers should retain a healthy informed scepticism.

Paul Childs finally made it in time to slot into the afternoon lecture spot, and he thanked British Airways for managing to 'get me here only one day late'.

He made a last minute change to his prepared talk, which was to include the Tourte and Peccatte families, instead he dealt only with the Tourte family which he felt would easily fill the desired time - and more.

The Tourte family has been the source of many mysteries to generations of bow makers and scholars. The first of the big puzzles, the real name of Tourte L which has never conclusively been known, was very quickly dealt with in Paul Childs first great revelation of the day. Tourte L in fact refers to Leonard or Nicola Leonard the brother of Francois and not his son as had previously been thought. There were, according to Childs, three Tourte bowmakers, Francois, his brother Leonard and their father whose christian name also had never been known. This too he shortly revealed as Nicola Pierre.

It is not known conclusively if Nicola Pierre was a bowmaker but it is thought

more likely that he was a luthier. A violin labelled 'Pierre Tourte Paris 1747' would seem to fit within the correct time scale but why should both Leonard and Pierre drop the first part of their christian names? Childs surmised that it may have been a familial necessity in order to distinguish between father and son but added that it is customary in the region of Lorraine to drop the first christian name.

Leonard was born in 1746 and Francois in either 1747 or 1748 which causes some problems when one tries to explain the obvious difference in the bows of Leonard and Francois. Tourte L bows always seem earlier, older. But how can this be if the brothers were separated by only one or two years? This was convincingly explained by Childs reference to earlier knowledge that Francois supposedly had been apprenticed to a watchmaker and therefore would have spent the years between twelve and twenty (or possibly longer) away from home. 'We see early bows by Leonard and struggle to find early bows by Francois remembering that they were both almost the same age'. Childs research supports the idea that Francois was involved in other matters during the early years and his return was most likely after the death of Pierre which occurred in 1764.

The brothers, according to the records, never appear at the same address but a number of 'transitional' bows show obvious signs of collaboration and lead us to believe that they lived in close proximity, and in fact later records show that Leonard's widow lived just around the corner from Francois. Leonard died in 1817 and Childs reckons that he made few, if any, bows during his final ten years.

Francois Tourte, watchmaker or not, has long been credited with the standard-

isation of the modern bow but the arrival to this standard must now correctly be seen to be just as much due to the work of his brother Leonard - Tourte L.

(One interesting note concerned the bows of James Tubbs. Childs stated that a number of bow heads by Tourte L from between 1790-1795 which bear no relation to previous or later models were the obvious model used by Tubbs for almost all of his production of Violin and viola bows).

The number of speakers this year was reduced to five to enable those attending some time on Saturday afternoon to study the instruments brought for display by the makers attending the conference. A large number of violins, violas and cellos were on show with numbers up considerably on the previous year. Others attending took the opportunity to ramble through the grounds or catch a little shut-eye' to compensate for lost sleep!

The concert on Saturday evening was again by the Cat Quartet who once more provided a rich and enthusiastic performance of works by Haydn and Tchaikovsky followed by a patient trial of the instruments on show.

The reorganised programme continued into Sunday with Dr. Jim Woodhouse, originally timetabled for Saturday afternoon, opening the proceedings in the great hall. He dealt in particular with the physics of the bowed string and what happens to cause acceptable or unacceptable noises.

Too often the science and practise of violin making seem too separated and a glimpse into a physics or acoustics textbook can leave the more practically motivated violin maker suffering from a bad case of indigestion. Jim Woodhouse has that rare gift of being able to combine the science and craft and spoon feed it

for easy consumption.

His views on the psychology at play in violin-playing echoed those of Prof. Beament in his talk last year; that the player, unconsciously or not, reacts to a variety of stimuli when assessing the 'sound' of an instrument. 'Players are influenced by problems in an instrument unless it is made by Stradivari' was how he put it. His words.

Control of bow pressure and the resultant 'unacceptable' noises when exceeded or otherwise, was explained using Schellengs diagram, a graph showing bow force against position and the overlapping area where helmholz motion is ideal. The principle of the 'wolf' note was explained in sufficient detail for a good grasp of the causes and no doubt left many makers with a clearer idea of the remedies (or should I say remedy!)

An intriguing aspect of his research involved the use of a 'virtual' violin, an instrument which exists only within his computer and when fed with varying information can provide the answers to many questions. For example he showed how the greatest and most marked change in the virtual picture occurred simply with a change of bow rosin and how stiffer strings were 'easier' to play than flexible ones.

In conclusion, he likened the total research to date to a jigsaw puzzle where the bits around the edges have been joined up but as yet the middle is still empty, in fact he said, 'most of the pieces are still missing'!

Setting-up instruments to maximise their potential was the chosen subject of the final speaker. Malcolm Siddall provided the practical input to the weekend and using a well prepared slide presentation took the audience

through a complete set-up of a 'trade' Mirecourt violin.

Replacement of bass bar, ebony crown, peg and pegbox problems, neck re-setting; virtually everything was dealt with in detail.

To some of the attendance the subject matter may have seemed too obvious or simplistic but to student and amateur makers such talks are essential and if the BVMA is to succeed in its stated aim of raising the standard of violin making then such talks are an essential part of this process. Malcolm Siddall's talk went a

## ELSTON SAWMILL

Steven Wright  
01636 - 525015

Back neck and rib wood converted  
on the premises from fine  
selected figured logs.  
Makers and repairers are invited  
to visit and make their own selection.

Elston Newark Notts.

long way to opening up new ideas in a large section of the listeners and I have no doubt that a further sizeable section were heartened to see their working methods reinforced in the telling. There were seven exhibitors showing in the east and west wings with tools, wood, bowhair and varnish materials for sale. All of the exhibitors contributed generously to the

raffle which took place on the Sunday afternoon.

The success of such a weekend lies somewhere between the social and academic. To provide both in correct measure is a balancing act which can succeed or fail by the smallest amount. This year the BVMA violin conference came up trumps in all areas. There was a

pleasant almost happy feeling surrounding the weekend's activities (it may have been all that fresh air, possibly the Dartmoor Ale) but it added to what was an interesting, sociable, fun two days which neatly manages to avoid being too esoteric or anorak-ish. Superb organisation, great food too!

Dartington? Long may it continue.

## WOOLLY BEARS

*Roy Collins warns*

From time to time somebody will come to me with a bow to be rehair and say, "I only had it rehaird by so and so last week and all the hairs are breaking". What is happening? Is so and so no good at his job? It usually appears that the hairs are broken randomly across the ribbon of hair. Sometimes people bring a bow on for rehair after the bow has been left idle in the case for many years and the same has happened. Could it be the Woolly bear or more precisely the larvae of the carpet beetle, *Anthrenus Verbasci* is at work or more likely at lunch?

This little insect is the Egon Ronay of the insect world. He is not satisfied to gorge himself on one hair but rather enjoys the ecstasy of sampling different hairs. He therefore takes a nip at many hairs savouring each mouthful and doing maximum damage to the bow.

It is essential to remove or exterminate the offending beasts before the next rehair bites the dust.

A friend of mine was smitten with this problem and appraised an acquaintance, a scientist who worked for a well known chemical manufacturer, of the situation. The scientist duly arrived, donned protective clothing including industrial gloves and goggles, and approached the affected cello case. The sight of this apparition approaching the half opened case was too much for the Woolly and it quickly disappeared without trace.

Fortunately if you suspect that the Woolly Bear is munching its way through your bow hair the remedy need not be as drastic. They measure about 4mm long and if you don't find them actually having a nibble of your bow hair they are usually lurking in the velvet of the case. The hunt is now on and it is best to exterminate them immediately they are found as although sometimes they appear to have expired they will suddenly jump out of the case to live another day. Failing this you could spray the inside of the case with a proprietary insert killer remembering to choose one with a fragrance you are prepared to live with and will not damage the varnish of your instrument.

Carpet Beetle (*Anthrenus Verbasci*)



# THE BACK PAGE

## LETTERS

*Dear Editor*

*During Any Other Business at the Annual General Meeting held recently I raised the issue of premises. My reasons for doing so are numerous:*

*The aim of our association is to promote British violin making - to this end I strongly believe that our identity will be greatly improved with the acquisition of a permanent residence, placing our instruments and the B.V.M.A. on the map.*

*The building could house a display open to the public all year round; it could be used to sell instruments made by the members; or a meeting place for customers (possibly the Benslow Trust) to play & choose instruments in a specifically designed room.*

*During the meeting it was discussed that the catalogue of exhibits from the 400 years' exhibition would be the start of a*

*library of information on instruments. Ideas concerning collecting tools, or buying students' instruments by the Rowan Amour-Brown Trust were also raised. Both these projects would benefit immensely from a permanent home.*

*Finally, for the association to grow and prosper it is essential that it should be seen as a self governing, autonomous unit; with premises of it's own this will be the case.*

*The problems of funding will undoubtedly be the lynch-pin of this debate, but the grants available from the E.U., the Lottery Fund, and other charitable trusts are not to be dismissed. Realistically this is a long term project and should be treated as such, however when the 400 years' show is over, another project must take its place.*

*Paul Jefferies*

*Dear Editor*

*After having heard the first lecture on TOURTE by Paul Childs: Dartington Sept '97, this came into my mind:*

### TAUTOLOGY

*Who taught Tourte to make a bow?  
And who taught Tourte to make it taut?*

*Who was the teacher of Tourte?*

*What? the 'L' !!*

*Its just a thought.*

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