

DECEMBER

Stepping in to solve a cello disaster, **STANLEY POTTS** realises that there are exceptions to every rule. Meanwhile, Frank drops a bombshell and Toby reveals a surprising use for tea leaves

06 TUESDAY

Business has been going very well lately. Toby's really pulling his weight now and has turned out to be quite useful (well... once I'd sorted him out and trained him up to my level). He joked that now he had gone up to working here four days a week he would really get a chance to learn all my violin making secrets. I set him straight on that matter and said to him: 'Toby, any maker who claims to have some "secret method" is probably just hiding the fact that he has no idea what he is doing.'

10 SATURDAY

Helen has had a disaster with that wonderful-sounding cello of hers. She didn't close the tailgate of her car properly and the cello fell out when she drove off. Luckily the strap on the case caught around the tow bar, but she drove for two miles before she realised what had happened. There are a couple of cracks in the belly, so the top will have to come off – I'll get Toby on to it next week.

I spent all afternoon hollowing my violin plates – I think the front and back are both quite close now. I've been trying for the right tap-tones but I'm not going to be able to get the back down to F sharp – it's still much too high. And the belly has already gone below F. Arthur Pemberton swore by this method, but I don't recall him managing to get the right notes very often either.

Had a call from Frank about taking me and Rose out for a pre-Christmas dinner. He mentioned he has some exciting news for us – I suppose he's bought himself another new BMW.

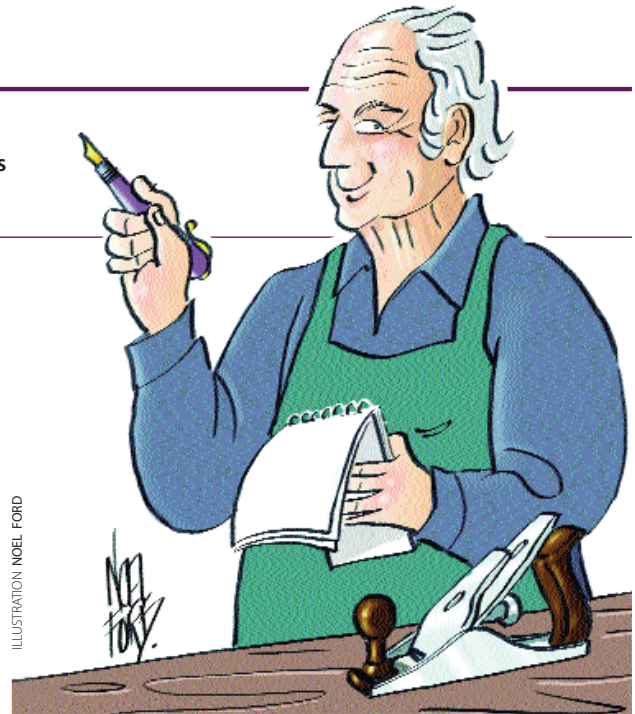
13 TUESDAY

Toby opened up Helen's cello and we both stood looking at it with open mouths. The inside of the belly has been left straight from the gouge and the integral bass-bar only extends for about a third of the body length. We took some measurements and the belly thickness varies from 2.8mm to 9.3mm... and yet it's one of the best-sounding cellos I've ever heard. Really, the longer I'm in this business the less sure I am about anything.

18 SUNDAY

I've done enough on my violin plates now – I ended up with the central area of the belly slightly thinner than the rest. Oh well... some people think reverse graduation could be a useful technique (that's the good thing about violin making – you can always find a theory somewhere that fits in with whatever you end up doing).

I made the usual meticulous notes in my book of all the final measurements (thicknesses, tap-tones, weights, etc, etc), though sometimes I wonder why I bother... I've never been able to make any sense of them at all.



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Dinner with Frank last night. He told us that he's in line for a promotion that could see him managing a new bank branch opening soon in Australia. When I asked whether he would need to travel there very often he laughed and said: 'No Dad, I'd have to move there permanently.' Rose was quite distressed at the idea – she's never really trusted Australians since that distant relative came and stayed with us for five weeks and cleaned out the drinks cabinet (it was lucky that I always keep the best stuff in the workshop).

23 FRIDAY

I gave Toby his Christmas present this morning – a copy of Heron-Allen. He looked very pleased (I recalled him saying that he'd never read it so it was certainly something he needed). I was pleasantly surprised when he brought out a gift for me as well – a bottle of Jameson's! Not a bad choice for a cheap whisky.

He got Helen's cello finished today. We resisted the temptation to 'improve' it at all – apart from fixing the cracks we left the belly exactly as it was. It's still sounding as good as ever.

Later we were discussing thicknessing and he told me that he uses a method involving tea leaves and a loudspeaker. I burst out laughing – what a ridiculous notion! Couldn't help making a joke about Guarneri taking a break from work to relax with a nice cup of Earl Grey before he connected up the Wharfedales. Toby looked slightly annoyed and said: 'Well how do you work out your final thicknesses, then?' I told him that was one of my trade secrets.

To find out more about Stanley Potts and his world, visit stanleypotts.co.uk