

FEBRUARY

The perils of varnishing test **STANLEY POTTS's** nerve, but **Toby** is keen to learn the secrets of his ground. Meanwhile, a phone call from Down Under brings happy news

01 WEDNESDAY

The violin is finished in the white and I've applied my usual gamboge ground (*à la* Heron-Allen). Now I'm bracing myself to start the varnishing – it's really the most nerve-wracking part of violin making. I never feel completely in control of the process... and to make matters worse I have no idea what colour Beth Hurley would prefer. It's very important to make sure the player is happy with the varnish (in fact, sometimes I think it's all they care about).

I was discussing this with Toby and he agrees – that's why he does antiqued varnish. He said that if a potential customer doesn't immediately fall in love with the look of the instrument then it doesn't matter how good it sounds, they just won't be interested.

03 FRIDAY

I was woken at 5.10am this morning by Frank phoning from Australia! It seems that he's quite capable of looking after billions of dollars of other people's money but he still can't manage to work out international time zones. Anyway, he's managed to find himself a modest little place in Sydney where he can see the harbour from every room in the house (including the bathroom!).

Beth Hurley called in this afternoon to tell me her teacher is thinking of entering her in some violin competitions but first she really needs to get a better instrument. She asked me if I had any ideas for a very cheap option (her father is still out of work)... I gave her an answer hinting that a very good instrument might just turn up in the next month or so. While she was here Toby very cleverly showed her a couple of violins he was working on and got her talking about varnishes – he was able to find out that she prefers a pale golden-brown colour (well done Toby!).

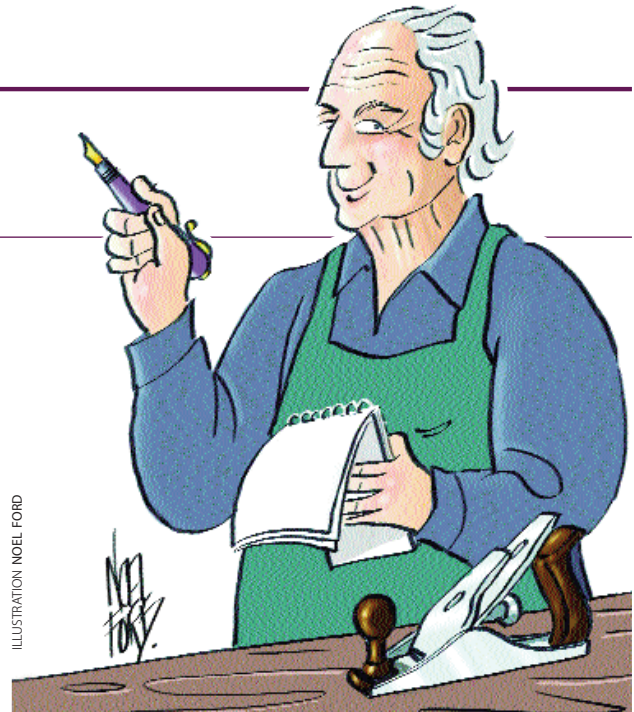
04 SATURDAY

I finally got my first coat of varnish on today (had to nip down to the art shop for a new brush first – I found I hadn't washed out the old one from the last violin I varnished three years ago). The colour came out a bit patchy but I should be able to even it up with the second coat.

08 WEDNESDAY

Just put the second coat on and it's gone even patchier! It's a disaster... looks awful! I think I may have to strip it all off and start again! I shoved it back in the UV cabinet – I'm too depressed to think about it.

When Toby came in he wanted my opinion on whether to rethicken one of his own violins. He made it a few years ago and thinks it may be too thick in the belly. I encouraged him to get stuck into it – after all, practically all of Guarneri's have been reglued and look what it's done for his reputation.



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He asked how the varnishing was going and I hedged around the question. Certainly don't want him to see it at the moment.

11 SATURDAY

I've just been looking at my violin again and it's actually not so bad after all. I put a third coat on today and managed to even up the colour somewhat. Anyway, if the varnish is applied too evenly it just ends up looking sterile and machine-made. A good varnish needs a bit of character.

Rose took a call from Frank this morning (6.25am this time). She told me all the news at breakfast – it seems I'm soon to be a grandfather. Frank was suggesting that we might like to consider moving to Australia ourselves... and Rose actually seemed very keen on the idea! She thought it might be a good time for me to think about retirement. I was amazed and said, 'Retire? – why would I want to retire? I'm at the top of my game. You just wait... This violin I'm making for Beth Hurley is going to kick-start my career.'

24 FRIDAY

The varnish turned out very well in the end. Even Toby was impressed with the result, though he was mostly interested in what I'd used for the ground coat. Apparently the 'secret ground' is the holy grail of violin making these days. I suppose they had to come up with some new myth to impress the customers, now that the idea of a 'secret varnish' has gone out of favour.

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