

MARCH

When his new workshop assistant arrives, **STANLEY POTTS** is keen to show him who's the boss. Luckily, Toby shares Stanley's penchant for Gilbert and Sullivan!

01 TUESDAY

Toby comes in tomorrow – I'd better try and clear a bit of bench space for him. Perhaps I should have mentioned to him that it's me who gets to choose the music (I hope he likes Gilbert and Sullivan... well, who wouldn't?).

Phoned the Browns about the cello bow that's still here (the one they brought in just before Christmas needing an urgent repair by Christmas Eve). They said they'd been very busy (as if I hadn't!) and would try to get in some time over the next week or two.

02 WEDNESDAY

Toby's first day. Got him started on fitting a bridge to a Stentor cello. I told him to do the string spacing at 1 7/8" and he looked completely blank – apparently he can only think in metric. I asked him how he ever got through Heron-Allen and he astounded me by saying that he's never read it! What do they teach them in this violin making school? Surely Heron-Allen is one of the standard textbooks.

I was telling him later about how lucky he was to find someone to employ him in the current economic climate, when he said: 'Yes, I've been asking Jenkins for the last year but he couldn't afford anybody.' (Jenkins!!! What on earth could he hope to learn from him!) I enquired why he had asked Jenkins for work before asking me and he quickly explained that it was only because Reigate was closer to home. I would have thought that a bit of extra travelling would be well worth it for the chance to work with someone of my reputation.

Anyway, he assured me that he loves Gilbert and Sullivan.

I4 MONDAY

Albert L__ turned up with yet another violin he's considering. This one is unlabelled, but the owner claims to have verbal opinions from a number of reputable dealers suggesting that there's a good chance that it might be Italian. Albert loves the sound of it and kept going on about the wonderful crackling in the varnish (apparently his Peter Guarneri also had 'wonderful crackling'). I must say, I can't understand this fascination with crackling – it may be a fine thing to have in roast pork, but most normal people would consider it a failure in a decorative finish.

I had no idea about its origin, so I told him I thought it was Czech.

I6 WEDNESDAY

Mrs Hurley has outdone herself! She arrived today with a big chocolate cake. Toby looked very pleased and helped himself to three large slices.

The switch on my inspection light is playing up AGAIN – that's the second time this week. Either that or the batteries have gone flat. It really is something of a technological miracle to design a switch that doesn't work with any amount of finger pressure but can still turn itself on when left completely unattended in a drawer.

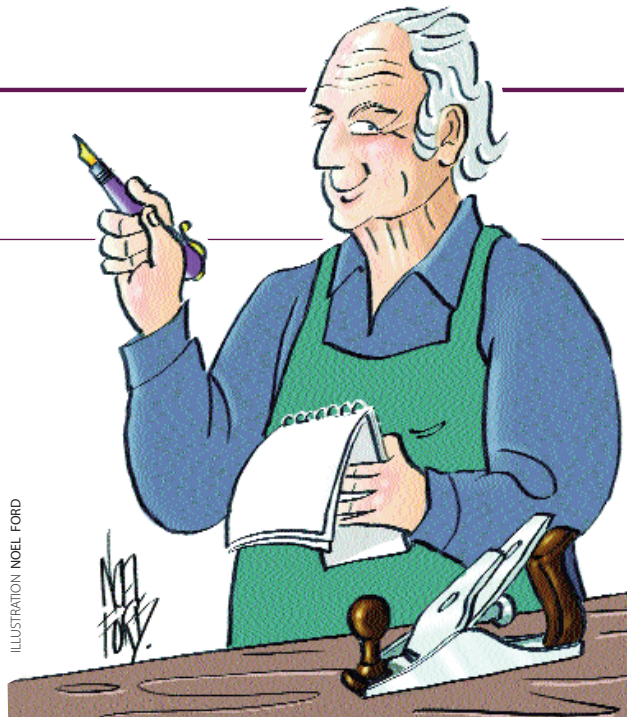


ILLUSTRATION NOEL FORD

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30 WEDNESDAY

Toby has finally gone home, so I can open the bottom drawer at last. He's been managing the work as well as could be expected I suppose... nowhere near paying for himself, of course – I wonder how long that will take? (I don't think it even occurs to him that there might eventually need to be some vague correlation between his wages and his output.)

We've worked our way through all of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas a number of times now, so I've started to introduce him to some of their other works. He seems to be enjoying them.

Albert decided not to buy the 'Italian' violin – he said he just couldn't feel confident playing it unless he was absolutely sure of its nationality.

31 THURSDAY

Toby brought in one of his own violins to show me...

Guarneri model, of course. The woodwork was quite neat (in fact, much too neat for a Guarneri) but he'd had some sort of disaster with the varnish – it was all streaky and blotchy. He explained that everyone was doing antiqued varnish now, and then added: 'The hardest part is getting the varnish to crackle convincingly.' I pointed out that antiquing seemed like a very useful way to cover up one's mistakes.

He's already planning the next instrument he wants to make – a copy of the 'Lord Wilton' Guarneri 'del Gesù'. I said, 'You'd better get your girlfriend to work on it for you then,' but it went right over his head.

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