

SEPTEMBER

It's been an inspiring week for **STANLEY POTTS**. Between Toby's sale, repairing fiddles from St Mark's and philanthropic urges, violin making is firmly back on the agenda

20 TUESDAY

Extraordinary!... a chap came in today looking for a British-made violin!... preferably a new one!! I couldn't help saying to him: 'You should be put on the endangered species list,' but he just looked completely blank. I told him that I had one of mine on the way and showed him the rib structure and roughly arched back, but he said that he was really after something a little more playable.

Then I remembered Toby's instrument. I dug it out and started apologising for the 'antiqued' varnish, but he said he quite liked it (there's no accounting for taste, I suppose). He ended up taking it home with him for a one-week trial.

21 WEDNESDAY

Oh dear... Mary just turned up with a great load of instruments from St Mark's for repair. They all need to be done urgently for this term's new students. She's left it till the last minute... as usual!

Brian also called in to drop off that Simone bow he's been restoring for me. He mentioned in passing that he'd sold two of his own bows last week! (I bet it only took him a week to make them both too.) It doesn't seem fair somehow... bow makers can knock out bows in a very short time and they seem to have no trouble at all in selling them for an indecent amount.

Toby very excited when I told him his fiddle was out on trial.

27 TUESDAY

Beth Hurley called in to get a rehair on the French bow I loaned her. She's been working on Ravel's *Tzigane* with her new teacher and been losing a lot of hair. I asked her to play it for me and I must say, she's sounding better every time I hear her. I noticed that she's getting quite tall now – she'll probably need a full-size violin before long. I don't know how her family will cope with that expense – her father still hasn't been able to find work.

The man with Toby's violin came back today, and brought his cheque book with him. Says it's the best new instrument he's ever played. What a pity he didn't get a chance to try one of mine.

I'm sitting here pondering the injustices of this whole business – I should be selling my own violins but I'm too busy patching up cheap chestnut-roasters to try and make them somehow resemble musical instruments. When I die, my epitaph will probably read: 'Potts could do amazing things with super glue and nail varnish.' And if I'm not doing that, then I'm selling plastic chin rests and E strings. What a waste!

I've just had a brilliant thought! (I always have my best ideas on the third whisky.) I should get my violin finished and give it to Beth Hurley to use. That girl has enormous potential, and what could be better than a top English player using an instrument made by one of England's leading makers?

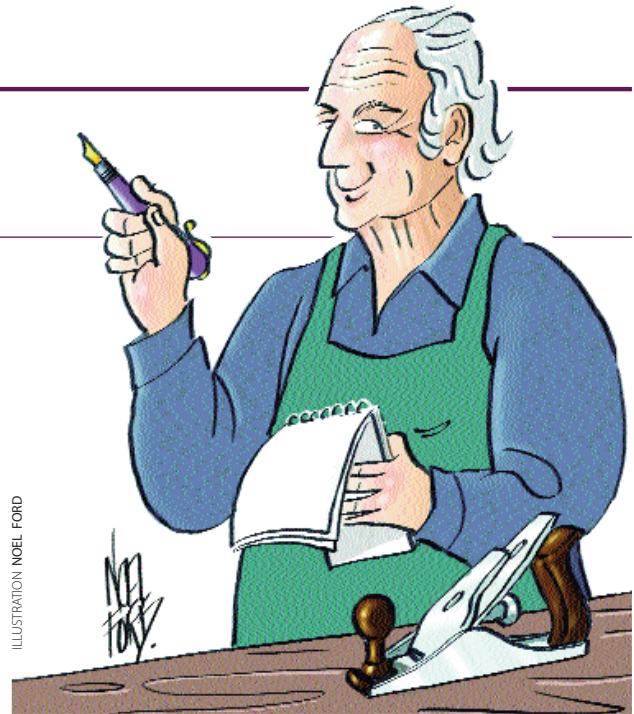


ILLUSTRATION NOEL FORD

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28 WEDNESDAY

Presented Toby with a cheque for his violin when he came in today. Also told him of my plans to ease up on the fine restoration work and devote more time to making new instruments. I asked him if he would like to come in for another day a week and he's agreed to do Fridays.

Good... he'll be able to get on with those Stentors from St Mark's.

30 FRIDAY

Toby spent the day sanding and staining fingerboards, steaming bridges and trying to get badly fitting pegs to hold. He was looking a bit fed up by the end of the day. Oh well... he's going to have to get used to it if he wants to make a living in this business. I told him he could have my title of 'Official Repairer to St Mark's School, Dorking', but he didn't seem particularly impressed.

I spent a very pleasant day sharpening gouges and preparing the wood for my linings. After careful consideration I decided to use willow rather than lime.

I'm meeting Jenkins at the Spotted Dog again this evening. I felt a bit sorry for Toby, so I asked him if he'd like to join us. He seemed pleased to be included and even offered to buy the first few rounds since he'd just sold an instrument of his own. Very decent of him. (I might just start with one of those expensive single malts they keep down behind the bar.)

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