

The Identification of Classical Cremonese Instruments of the Violin Family

Text and Illustrations by Roger Graham Hargrave

Part I, History and Lives

Please take time to read this warning!

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Authors Preface

‘The Identification of Classical Cremonese Violins’ is a work in progress. It was started in the summer of 1988. Having just turned forty I knew an awful lot. Not quite as much as I knew when I was twenty, but still a lot. Well, today I only know a lot about what I don’t know. Perhaps the title should be: ‘What Hargrave Doesn’t Know About the Identification of Classical Cremonese Violins’

Although this work was written by me, the technical editing and most of the archive research was carried out by Carlo Chiesa. No doubt Carlo will wish to disassociate himself from the introductory passages. He has generally confined himself to correcting factual information about the lives and times of these great men (and possibly women). This sounds like a small contribution but believe me it is not. Carlo has been immersing himself in dusty documents for as long as I have known him. And that is a long time. The more controversial ideas remain mine and mine alone.

For several reasons I decided to publish this work,

along with some of my previous published works, on the internet free of charge. Firstly, it has long been my belief that too many violin books are beyond the financial means of most musicians and makers, especially students of both. Secondly, and of overriding importance, is the fact that the structure of such a site effectively means that the work can be revised as and when new information is forthcoming. Indeed, it is my hope that this site will eventually allow contributions to be made by other parties. (Subject to vetting space and editorial time)

The first volume of this work is now more or less complete. It is a little over 60,000 words. This initial volume will be issued in sections of PC manageable length over a period of months. Much of the second volume is already well advanced. It will be much larger than the first volume. Unfortunately there is still a huge amount of work to be done especially regarding illustrations. The restrictions to its completion are simply financial.

Deserved or otherwise, Carlo Chiesa and I have long established reputations as authors’ lecturers and researchers on the subject of the violin family. Nevertheless, we are both first and foremost professional violin makers, and as with our previous works this

particular work has been financed by our instrument making. Neither Carlo nor I have profited financially from any of the substantial works that we have published over the years and we are aware that this particular work will be no exception.

This is perhaps a good time to say that I am looking for a suitable editor to correct and sharpen the text. Unfortunately I can offer only a zero salary to the best applicant. So, if anyone out there knows of a happy editor who is either a multi millionaire or can survive on a diet of dry bread and water, Carlo and I would like to hear from them.

I deliberated for a long time about the nature of this book. The violin is steeped in myths and legends, which in no small measure have contributed to its charms. My concern was that by removing some of the mystery surrounding the violin I would somehow be destroying their magic. As Keats (1795-1821) said, "...all charms fly / At the mere touch of cold philosophy". Well this may be so, but knowing the ingredients and watching a master chef working with them should not diminish the delights of a fine meal. Indeed, in many cultures this is considered an enriching process. In the same way, being familiar with the score can only increase ones appreciation of a virtuoso performance. So perhaps understanding something about the lives and works of the great Cremonese makers will serve to enhance rather than diminish the magnificence of these most influential of all instruments.

For almost five hundred years this family of instruments has played a huge role in the development of European music and culture. However, in spite of its antiquity and its highbrow reputation the violin is neither obsolete nor a snob. Apart from its still expanding classical repertoire, throughout the world it has been adopted by talented players of folk, jazz, blues, rock and roll, and virtually every aspect of the modern entertainment industry. The days may have gone when an instrument hung on the wall in almost every household. But today hardly a waking hour goes by without our hearing its dulcet tones. Moreover, although most people no longer recognise the fact, the film, television and advertising productions that they devote so much time to watching, would appear sterile and flat if instruments of the violin family were not establishing the mood and emphasizing the action.

Introduction

In 1994 an exhibition of instruments at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, commemorated the 250th anniversary of the death of the Cremonese violinmaker Giuseppe Guarneri 'del Gesu'. Each of the twenty-five violins on display was insured for five million dollars. Since this time many Cremonese masterpieces have changed hands for prices considerably higher than these insurance valuations. In fact, long before the end of the 20th century, the buying and selling of classical Cremonese violins had already become a multi-million dollar business.

Although there has always been big money in the violin trade, within three decades the value of these extraordinary antiques increased at an unprecedented rate. During the 1980's and early 1990's, instruments of the violin family were one of the world's most rewarding investment possibilities. This relentless surge in the value of important Cremonese violins drew all other "old" violins into its wake. Today, whether inflated by association or by merit, the prices realised for instruments once considered basic to every orchestral string player, have risen almost beyond their reach. As a result, when purchasing an instrument, professional musicians are not only investing larger amounts, they are investing a larger proportion of their salary.¹

There can be no doubt that many musicians have benefited from these inflationary conditions. On leaving the profession after years of service, they were able to fund a comfortable retirement from the sale of their prized musical companion. For these fortunate players, investing in the tools of their trade proved significantly more profitable than any inflation-linked pension fund. Indeed this arrangement would be ideal were it not for the fact that, year after year, many of their colleges, have all dreams of a comfortable old age brutally shattered. On trying to sell their precious Cremonese instrument many will discover that it is not what they confidently believed it to be.

Some instruments, though genuine and outwardly fine, will be in poor condition internally. Some may be composites made from several instruments. Some will no doubt turn out to be clever fakes. But most will be cases of mistaken identity, fraudulent labelling or deceitful attribution. In truth, the possibilities for deliberate deception or simple but costly mistakes are as endless as Wagner's Ring.

Some of the problems that can arise will be examined in the course of this work. However, this work should be regarded as a warning, not a solution. In

the violin business, when errors become apparent several years after the event, it is notoriously difficult to win redress in the customer's favour.

It is not without reason that the word "fiddle" has a sinister connotation.² The price tags of antique violins and the palpable lack of any professional regulatory body have always attracted rogues. And although for centuries, numerous otherwise prudent individuals have been persuaded to invest in worthless "fiddles," in our times such investments can, and often do, cost musicians a lifetime of saving.

A major reason for this inflation has been the recent willingness of banks and credit institutions to finance expensive instruments, when less than half a century ago this was hardly possible. This easier credit has persuaded many more musicians to buy expensive antique instruments and has undoubtedly contributed to today's price increases. Since credit institutions are interested only in the borrower's collateral, players are more or less at the mercy of the dealer and the certification of the instrument in question. When these fail (for whatever reason), musicians are usually left to pick up the tab with little chance of compensation.

Remarkably, credit institutions have themselves become so convinced about returns on violins that many have formed their own collections. In 2002, the Austrian National Bank (Oesterreichische Nationalbank) published a catalogue of the 29 most important instruments in their possession.³ The collection includes seven instruments by Antonio Stradivari, three by Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesu and four by the Bergonzi family. At today's prices, the collective value of these 14 instruments alone is many tens of millions of dollars.

In fact, in collusion with several major violin dealers, numerous banks and credit institutions have been actively encouraging city investors. Such investors only speculate where private money has established the market's long-term reliability. Indeed, although few professional musicians can afford the spectacular sums that the great Cremonese masters can bring, it is their aspirations and capital that continue to sustain this vigorous trade. Unfortunately, it is they who usually suffer when things go wrong.

In fairness, it might be argued that the violin business is no better or worse than the art and antiques trade generally. However, nowhere in this vast market are the livelihoods of individuals so demonstrably interwoven with the potential rewards and hazards

as they are in the violin trade. Art and antiques may be purchased as an investment or simply for the love and appreciation of what they are, but they are generally considered luxury commodities and, as such, are usually purchased with expendable income. In contrast, as much as they might be works of art, antique violins are also working musical instruments. The problem is that their reputation for sound has been given so much credence or hype (depending upon your point of view), that many professional players consider them essential to their career prospects. The widely held belief that antique instruments, and in particular classical Cremonese instruments, sound better has been propagated for centuries by those engaged in their trade. Whether justified or not, this conviction has persuaded many musicians to finance such works regardless of the sacrifice.

Surprisingly, notwithstanding their close association with instruments and their undoubted ability to assess playability and tonal quality, few musicians can either identify or evaluate instruments. Neither are they generally aware that the identity of the maker is far more important to an instrument's monetary value than the sound the instrument produces. Indeed, many young players are shocked to learn that the sound of an antique violin has little if any bearing upon its price.

Despite the great emphasis laid on sound, tone quality is almost never assessed or referred to in insurance or auction valuations. Only when instruments are being offered for sale does this factor become a major issue. Dealers are acutely aware that tone is the musician's Achilles heel. They know that musicians will often pay highly inflated prices for good-sounding but otherwise inferior instruments, or that they will take on large loans to purchase an antique violin in the belief that somehow it will transform them into a Stern or a Milstein.

It has often been claimed that Cremonese instruments can be identified by their unique tonal qualities. Some aficionados even believe they can discern a specific Stradivari timbre. This is nonsense. The simple truth is that, while players can occasionally be recognized by their style and technique, no one has yet proved capable of identifying the instruments of a particular maker solely by their sound. Even the apparently obvious distinction between the acoustical properties of a Stradivari and a Guarneri del Gesu has continually defied serious analysis. The idea of a tonal fingerprint unique to a specific maker is pure

fiction.⁴ While it is possible to identify a fine tone in a violin, it is not possible to identify a violin by the tone. Documentary evidence excepted, the process of instrument identification, as with all other objects of art and antiquity, is essentially a visual one. Indeed, even the latest scientific weapons of analysis such as dendrochronology and electron microscopes are merely an extension of this ocular process.

The Connoisseur's Craft and Its Role in Instrument Identification and Valuation

“What are you thinking about?” she asks.

At this point I lie. I wasn't thinking about Martin Amis or Gérard Depardieu or the Labour Party at all. But then, obsessives have no choice; they have to lie on occasions like this. If we told the truth every time, then we would be unable to maintain relationships with anyone from the real world.

— Nick Hornby, *Fever Pitch*.

It has been suggested that the process of identifying and valuing antique bowed stringed instruments is essentially a visual one, and that most players have little or no expertise in this field. It has also been stated that bowed instruments have become increasingly more expensive.

The following section examines why violin connoisseurs monopolize the identification and valuation of instruments, and the dilemma caused by the fact that these connoisseurs are often the dealers who are selling the instruments they are appraising. It also explains why, in spite of this dilemma, there is still no viable alternative to consulting a reputable connoisseur-dealer.

Ideally, a reputable connoisseur should be able to confirm the identity and authenticity of an instrument, accurately assess the extent of repairs and restorations, and from this information, calculate its market value. However, this is a formidable task, and one that not every connoisseur is equal to. Moreover, for numerous reasons, even the best connoisseurs do not always concur.⁵ Regrettably for the potential customer, assessing the value of a connoisseur's opinion can often be as demanding as assessing the prove-

nance of a particular instrument.

At present, the only way to become a connoisseur of violins is to become seriously involved in dealing. The single viable alternative to this path lies in restoring antique violins for a prolific dealer. Although it does not follow that all dealers are experts, it is mainly they who are tasked with assessing the constant flow of merchandisable instruments from which, if they are astute, they can gradually learn the craft of instrument identification. In contrast, even the wealthiest and most active of collectors cannot afford to amass the number and diversity of instruments needed to become a recognized connoisseur. And in this respect, even the world's most important museum collections are woefully inadequate.

Very occasionally, a musician will become adept at instrument identification, but here again their expertise is often linked to a secondary interest in dealing. Otherwise, musicians are generally limited to familiarizing themselves with the instruments of their colleagues, and usually without reference to provenance, certification or other guidance.

Because access to a sufficient number and diversity of instruments is largely restricted to dealers, it is they who control and regulate expertise. They alone can acquire enough knowledge to become recognized connoisseurs. And, only those dealers who become recognized connoisseurs have the authority to assess, evaluate and certify instruments. So those who buy and sell violins are the consumers' only form of protection, their only safeguard against dishonest or misguided dealers. Unlike other branches of the arts, the violin world has never had the controlling influence of an independent body of scholarship, such as might be found in galleries, museums and universities.

Put simply, there are no independent experts in the violin trade. And no potential customer should fail to remember this fact. In the end, customers are heavily dependent upon the honesty and integrity of the connoisseur-dealer concerned.

However, in spite of these worries, the violin business still has some formidable expertise and, if one knows where to look, some considerable honesty and integrity at its disposal.

At its finest, instrument identification not only involves the naming of a particular master but also the period of that master's career in which the work was completed. In order to achieve this, the connoisseur must have had access to many instruments over

many years and have studied these works in meticulous detail. Eventually, the very process of compiling, analyzing and correlating information heightens the connoisseur's perception. In another context, such a state might well be termed "enlightenment." Enlightenment of this nature, however, is not an innate gift. Like a good golf swing, it requires hard, repetitive practice. Natural talent (whatever that might be) may help, but it is total dedication to any discipline that creates outstanding ability, and such dedication is invariably the product of passion. There never has been and never will be a truly great connoisseur who was not obsessed with fiddles.

Regardless of effort or obsession, the extent of any connoisseur's "enlightenment" is more restricted than generally imagined. History has seen hundreds of thousands of violin makers. Some were celebrated and prolific but many, perhaps most, were obscure and produced very few instruments. Although theoretically it is the job of the connoisseur to identify all surviving instruments, this is an impossible task. The simple truth is that no connoisseur can claim to have examined even a single example of every school, let alone of every maker's work. Accordingly, each connoisseur is required to make judgements based upon a relatively small sample of the available whole.

It may surprise musicians and collectors to learn that when a connoisseur knows the life and works of 25 to 30 historical makers in detail, this is already an exceptional achievement.⁶ With considerable effort, a dependable familiarity with a further hundred or so may be realized. However, beyond this, most connoisseurs are at best reduced to calculated guesswork. Although this is no exaggeration, it does not mean that connoisseurs are incompetent. Considering the incalculable number of men and women who have made one or more instruments of the violin family,⁷ a well-educated guess is more than might fairly be expected.

Given the enormous number of violin makers, there has always been a tendency for connoisseurs to specialize. Some specialize in geographical regions, others in price ranges. Although minor national schools or inexpensive instruments may be as worthy of academic scrutiny as classical Italian works, in most other respects, they are not. The intrinsic beauty of many classical Italian instruments, their undeniable sonority and their stylistic authority has caused their monetary value, and hence their prestige, to increase dramatically over the centuries. Consequently, when the violin world speaks of lead-

ing connoisseurs, it is usually referring to those conversant with classical Italian instruments. Furthermore, because the status of experts on classical violins is exalted, their broader ability is often overestimated - even within the trade. In reality, among the world's famous connoisseurs, past and present, knowledge of the minor schools is often extremely limited. This is because such connoisseurs ignore the minor, less valuable schools either by design or default, and connoisseurs cannot hope to know that which they do not see on a regular basis. The truth is that genuine universal experts are a rarer breed than virtuoso violinists. They may even be a myth.

Given the numbers involved, recording the names, dates and dwelling places of violin makers has always proved a notoriously demanding task. But these difficulties cannot be compared to the perils of recording and recalling the physical peculiarities of the instruments these makers produced. And this is especially true whenever such information is applied to the business of buying and selling. Dabbling with dealing may not be as hazardous as volcanology or as menacing as nuclear physics, but the potential for disaster is still substantial.

In spite of this, albeit with some effort, the physical details and typical features of violins can be learned. Nevertheless, simple data, however all-inclusive, does not in itself constitute insight or enlightenment. In this respect, top connoisseurs are usually so well versed in the technical details and typical features of fine violins that they need only refer to this knowledge in challenging cases. As a rule, any instrument that lies within a connoisseur's sphere will be recognized intuitively. Familiarity with minutiae may be an essential part of the connoisseur's skills, but reliance on such details is usually the mark of a novice. Accordingly, it is the novice who will take fright when a usual feature is absent from a perfectly genuine instrument, and it is the novice who will accept the fake that includes all the salient features of a maker's work.

Partly because of the perils referred to above, a number of connoisseurs believe in restricting information about instrument identification, invoking such arguments as "a little learning is a dangerous thing." Unfortunately, however sincere their motives, they are basically advocating a cartel, and whenever a cartel seeks to restrict or control information, it not only hinders competition but also stifles scholarship. In addition, no matter how well intentioned, restrictive practices almost always lead to corruption.

Regardless of these concerns, everyone must begin somewhere and as long as the dangers and limitations of such knowledge are fully realized, violins of any school can be described, compared and identified with some success.

This work is an attempt to bring together what is currently known about the lives, style and method of the great Cremonese violinmakers. It has been constructed so that the reader can observe how the process of expertise works. In the short term it may not turn them into connoisseurs, but it ought to help them identify one. In the longer term, by removing some of the mystique surrounding the craft of expertise, and replacing it with some accurate genealogy and a solid foundation of structural and stylistic analysis the reader's 'ways of seeing' will be improved. From which point, they will be able to expand and develop their proficiency, if necessary, alone.

The Importance of Background Knowledge

In the past, for better or for worse, a small international network of dealers controlled the buying and selling of fine violins. Whatever the negative aspects of this arrangement, there was one very definite advantage. Choice instruments tended to be concentrated in a few very select shops. Indeed several establishments could legitimately claim to have handled virtually every important classical Italian instrument. As a result of such concentrations, a number of these dealers became adept at recognizing the works of individual makers and the schools to which they belonged. Although the heyday of these establishments began in the mid 19th century, the origins of these dealer networks, and the expertise they acquired, go back further than might be imagined. Even before the end of classical period of Italian violinmaking, dealers were recording details about instruments of the violin family, and these records often included biographical information about their makers.

The most important of these early chroniclers, was the Turin violin enthusiast, Count Ignazio Alessandro Cozio Di Salabue, 1755 - 1840. Upon the death of his father, Count Cozio inherited an Amati violin and this appears to have sparked his enthusiasm for Cremonese instruments. More than two hundred years

after the first instruments of Andrea Amati, Count Cozio began assembling a massive body of knowledge about classical Italian violins and their makers. The Count was primarily interested in the Amati and Stradivari families, but many Italian makers are mentioned in his notes. The major part of this work became known as the 'Carteggio'. Although the 'Carteggio', is of paramount importance, in compiling the information the Count often relied upon word of mouth reports, rather than serious investigation. As a result some of his conclusions are occasionally incomplete, and at times inaccurate. Because much of today's expertise is based upon that which the Count reported it is essential that this fact be appreciated.

Count Cozio's agents, Alessandro Maggi and Vincenzo Lancetti, provided a large amount of the information contained in his records, but he was also assisted, if not instructed by the Mantagazza family of violinmakers,⁸ and later by the ageing maker Giovanni Baptista Guadagnini⁹. In addition he probably received details from other dealers in musical instruments, such as Giovanni Michele Anselmi di Britta of Casale. Anselmi, who dealt in textiles and stringed instruments, is thought to have introduced the young Count Cozio, then aged about 18, to the 62-year-old G. B. Guadagnini.

Cozio Di Salabue may not have been the first collector-dealer to make observations about the lives and works of the great Italian makers, but his grand treatises forms the basis of everything which is now known about them. His 'Carteggio' is the 'Rosette Stone' of violin expertise. The script is often small, and in note form, with further tiny comments tightly packed in the wide margins. A complete translation of Count Cozio's diaries, letters, inventories, and observations, would run into many hundreds if not thousands of pages. Mainly because of this, these works have never been translated in their entirety, (even into modern Italian). And as a result, although the importance of his work is generally accepted, the extent of his knowledge and the information contained in his writings has still not been fully realized, even by some of the world's leading experts.

Cozio's notes included a number of large illustrations, which are so good, that several instruments are clearly identifiable. Amongst them are the 1741 'Vieuxtemps' violin by Joseph Guarneri del Gesu, a violin by Pietro Guarneri of Mantua, dated 1709 and a rare viola by Hieronymus Amati II.¹⁰ Instruments are also identifiable from the Counts vivid descriptions,

the best-known example being a Francesco Stradivari violin now appropriately known as the 'Salabue'.¹¹

Subsequent authors have added to this pool of knowledge, but only Count Cozio Di Salabue and his associates, were personally acquainted with violinmakers of the classical Italian school. Apart from Giovanni Baptista Guadagnini and his various connections, Pietro Giovanni Mantagazza,¹² was a pupil of Carlo Ferdinando Landolfi¹³ who may also have been conversant with a number of Milanese makers. Mainly because of these personal contacts the Count knew of and could recognize many Italian violinmakers, (especially of the Milanese school), whose works are now impossible to identify.

Cozio's experiences with other dealers were not dissimilar to that which might be expected today. Wheeling and dealing musical instruments is older than the business of violin making and although accounts about this side of the business are rare, by the 18th century, violin dealing itself was already several centuries old. Not all these dealers were practicing instrument makers. Cloth merchants and the like often carried instruments as a lucrative sideline. Fraud was a factor from the earliest times, and like most fledgling dealers, Count Cozio gradually learned by his mistakes. At one point following a bad deal he wrote, "I no longer purchase violins without seeing them". Not that the count himself was without sin. On a number of occasions he records practices that would be considered highly unethical today. In spite of such behaviour, the Counts saving grace was his overriding enthusiasm for the instruments. It was this enthusiasm that led him to secure the many tools, patterns, and moulds of Antonio Stradivari as well as numerous fine instruments by the master, (including the infamous 'Messiah' Stradivari of 1716). Initially several items were obtained from Antonio's son Paolo Stradivari, with the remainder coming from his grandson Antonio Stradivari II. These workshop materials now form the basis of the 'Museo Stradivariano' collection in Cremona.

Count Cozio Di Salabue was undoubtedly one of the first connoisseurs and collectors of classical violins; however it was his role as a highly successful dealer that was of paramount importance. In this respect, the Count was one of the first individuals conforming to the principle that dealing is the primary route to violin expertise.

In the days of ocean liners and steam trains, throughout Europe and the Americas, a number of

important violin dealing companies appeared to develop an unusual series of alliances. Essentially these companies were far enough apart for competitive comfort, but close enough for business ties to be highly profitable. Occasionally, they became so close that family members were sent to study with colleagues' abroad, in essence refining their expertise and strengthening business ties. To many outsiders, these international bondings seemed like some clandestine society protecting a cache of secret knowledge. There was certainly an element of nepotism involved and information about the craft of expertise was undoubtedly controlled and restricted by the directors of these elite companies. This may have flown in the face of academia, but there is nothing intrinsically wrong with such a system. The accumulation and suppression of specialized knowledge, was and still is accepted practice in many professions.

Accordingly, unlike violinmaking itself, no formal apprenticeship scheme has ever existed for the craft of expertise. It is a skill that has traditionally been handed down, usually within family businesses, from one generation to the next. Although undoubtedly elitist this system has generally proved reliable, and for the most part, expertise has remained an oral tradition.

However, early in the 20th century the first scholarly efforts investigating the lives and times of the great violinmakers appeared in print. The Hill Brothers of London¹⁴ carried out the most famous of these investigations. As directors of one of the world's oldest and most prolific violin dealing companies they were ideally suited to the task. The Hills wrote and published the most important works on Antonio Stradivari and the Guarneri family.¹⁵ These books set the standard and for almost a hundred years the Hills efforts were neither surpassed, nor equalled.

In spite of the Hill publications, it was not until the 1960's and 70's that the first indications of changes to the traditional method of gaining expertise began to appear. These changes occurred on several fronts. The end of the Second World War had seen a marked shift in the concentration of fine instrument. They were gradually relocating from the depleted European economies to the United States of America. In addition, by the 1960's American liberalism¹⁶ was spreading across Europe at an unprecedented rate. This spread was aided by American popular culture, and the weakening of Europe's ruling elite, both a direct result of two world wars.

This liberalisation manifested itself in several ways

in the violin business. In the United States the Wurlitzer Company (famous for its organs and juke boxes) established a violin dealership under the leadership of Rembert Wurlitzer¹⁷. Wurlitzer, and his Italian employee Simone F. Sacconi,¹⁸ are often regarded as the fathers of modern violin restoration. But more especially, it was Wurlitzer and Sacconi who initiated a new approach to violin expertise. More than anyone they were responsible for liberating a freer thinking generation of experts and connoisseurs not bound by Europe's old school conformity. Their partnership eventually led to the publication of Sacconi's work, "The 'Secrets' of Stradivari", in 1979. In the first half of the 20th century the Hills Brothers had written the definitive works on Antonio Stradivari and the Guarneri Family.¹⁹ But, whereas the Hills had addressed the subject of expertise obliquely, Sacconi's "Secrets of Stradivari" attacked the subject head on. Sacconi may have come to one or two questionable conclusions, but his work was a tour de force in terms of its disclosure of previously 'secret' information.

At the same time traditional apprenticeship schemes were being wholly or partially replaced by various technical colleges and institutions. Across Europe and the United States schools of violin making were either being created or were busy reinventing themselves. And later, as Asia rapidly embraced western classical music, violin making schools spread across the entire world. It can be argued that this rapid increase in the number of violin-making schools raised the standard of violin making and restoration immeasurably. However, it can also be argued that in raising the skill levels of their pupils, these schools also raised their aspirations and expectations. And, as the number of schools increased so did the number of skilled and ambitious violin makers.²⁰

Somewhat ironically this apparently positive development may eventually lead to a serious decline in the ability of the next generation of connoisseurs.²¹ As this new generation of trained violin makers began to emerge many were attracted to violin dealing. However, because the number of genuine instruments is finite, as the number of dealers has grown, the opportunity for individuals to examine instruments has decrease accordingly. In the near future aspiring connoisseurs may not have access to the concentrations of instruments required to gain genuine expertise.

For those ambitious to become connoisseurs the

gradual easing of restrictions that occurred in the later part of the 20th century will undoubtedly be helpful, but gaining expertise never was and never will be, a job for the faint hearted. Even for those fortunate enough to be born into 'the family business' there were no guarantees. The essential information may be served on a silver spoon, but it must still be digested. Privilege cannot turn indifference into virtuosity. Genuine expertise can only be achieved by total dedication to the craft. The demise of so many once important family businesses is testimony to this truth. In addition the crafts inevitable association with dealing, where mistakes can cost millions, has given modern expertise a seriously intimidating edge.

The identification of violins is essentially a visual process, but recent archive research has moved the craft of the connoisseur to another level. This has been supplemented by some serious scientific and methodological investigation. Much of this information has cast considerable doubt on the ability of connoisseurs to identify instruments and their makers with the confidence displayed by previous generations. From a position of relative certainty instrument identification has unexpectedly become a continually changing discipline, with fresh findings increasingly upsetting established doctrines. Those who do not make the effort to understand these changes will fail.

In this work the long journey towards identifying individual instruments begins with appreciating historical context within which they were created. Incredibly many prospective experts display a profane indifference to history. This is a grave error. In developing expertise it is simply not enough to examine instruments. Even though information concerning the lives and times of the classical maker's is still rather scanty, that which is available is an essential element of the connoisseurs' craft. The examination of a single instrument can only assist the expert in identifying similar examples of the same maker's work, from the same period. Whereas if it is known when and where a maker worked, who he worked for, and who in turn worked for him, then the examination of a single instrument will frequently reveal something about the work of several makers. In practice such information shapes the judgement of connoisseurs on a daily basis.